



MASTER THESIS

“I AM A BUTTERFLY WHO WANTS TO FLY”

Narratives of prostitution in Managua.



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Let's listen to the women
their feet are dancing on the sand
let's listen to them
and be silent.

(Gioconda Belli)

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

My aim in this thesis is to explore the experiences and life stories of different age women in Nicaragua, who are involved to a certain extent in street prostitution. The importance of exploring different age groups is to understand what Nicaraguan NGOs call “the cycle of prostitution” (CEBS and Mary Barreda, 2006): the cycle in which girls¹ and women start selling sex, remain and may quit afterwards. Within their life stories, my intention is to discuss gender identities and gender norms in Nicaragua in light of the different feminist approaches that exist in regard to prostitution. Among the life story interviews I conducted, I have divided my informants into three different age groups: teenagers believed at serious risk from starting prostitution, current women-who-prostitute and ex-prostitutes; and I have chosen six of them as my main informants. Not only will I explore how prostitution shapes their world, but more particularly, I will explore how my informants live with the stigma attached to this kind of activity whilst also considering, what they think of their past as well as what they want and expect about their future lives.

In order to introduce this research, in this chapter I will present my motivations and inspirations that encouraged me to write this thesis; also including a brief outline of the history of prostitution, the economic and social climate of Nicaragua and the overview of this thesis.

1.1 MY INSPIRATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS

I had two fundamental inspirations that helped me to explore this topic. The first being prior to my fieldwork, I noticed what appeared as a contradiction in modern capitalist societies where women-who-prostitute are condemned and yet demanded. This situation gives rise to an uncertainty for the women who are wanted and criticized at the same time. Prostitution is, in my opinion, a very controversial and interesting topic as it deals with questions regarding gender norms and beliefs of society. Considering this, I thought of it as an interesting field to explore in this “Gender and Development” Master Thesis.

¹ Although I know there are also men involved in prostitution, in my stay in Nicaragua I did not see men-prostitutes. The majority was women and there were also transsexuals, who were considered women by the organization I worked with, and so I consider them women too.

My second inspiration was a situation that I experienced during fieldwork. One night during one of our walks in Managua, three NGOs staff members and I were talking with a group of women-who-prostitute. Suddenly, we were all hit by flying tomatoes that were thrown from a truck passing by. Someone, who thought we were all women-who-prostitute, was insulting us and he proceeded to scream insults such as ‘whores, daughters of a bitch...’ while throwing the tomatoes. After he passed, a strange thing happened. We, the staff members, were all concerned about what had happened as some of us were also hit by the tomatoes; whereas the women-who-prostitute continued as if nothing had happen: they ignored it. Later on that evening, when I arrived home and started thinking about what had happened, I felt quite sad as I realised that these women seemed to be used to this kind of incident and could not do anything against it.

As I will present in this thesis, being hit by a tomato is not even among the worst experiences that have happened to these women; but as I experienced this in first person, it inspired me and validated my intention to write this thesis in a narrative way. The women ignored this episode, but in my opinion these episodes of violence should not be ignored and should be acknowledged. Additionally, even if this violent episode did motivate me, I do not intent to promote a view of women-who-prostitute as victims, because as I will also illustrate, these life stories portray women who fight for survival in the everyday and yet, have the courage to move on despite their circumstances.

Prostitution is a controversial issue that reflects many different and contrasting ideals and norms, making it very difficult not to place yourself in a moral or even political stance. After completing my fieldwork and having interviewed women and girls involved in prostitution, my intention is that of trying to give a voice to the silent and to learn from their experiences. The result being to help the reader reflects upon an issue that it is normally pushed aside by society. I agree with Lorraine Nencel in the fact that feminist research should contribute to improve informants lives (Nencel, 2001). As I plan to translate this thesis to Spanish and send it to Nicaragua NGOs, my own way of trying to help, it is to give voice to my informants, so their stories will be heard. I wish that it may contribute to promote debates and reflections that will help to improve these women’s and girl’s lives.

1.2 BRIEFLY OUTLINE ABOUT PROSTITUTION WITHIN HISTORY

Although the word ‘prostitute’ derives from Latin², the first historical records about the existence of prostitution date from the Antique Egypt (Ordoñez, 2006). It was not until the IV B.C century that the first written statements about prostitution emerged. Since then, and according to Lacqueur (1992), the conceptualization of prostitution and women-who-prostitute has changed within time. Women-who-prostitute were seen from the Antique history until the Renaissance as barren. Aristotle explained it to be because of the ‘calor genitalis’ and this conception continued into medieval times and through the Renaissance, when they considered the womb of the women-who-prostitute too moist to have children (Ibid, 1992). According to Lacqueur (1992), it was not until the 19th century that prostitution was regarded as a vice which threatened society and women-who-prostitute as harmful individuals. In the words of Varela, this was linked to the institutionalization of prostitution, which is at the same time related to the beginnings of salary work and monogamy marriages (Varela 1995 in Juliano 2001).

With regard to contemporary history, women-who-prostitute were considered as having particular need of sex in the 19th century or as sufferers from a psychopathological disorder in the early 20th (Kong, 2006). Prostitution was perceived, as noted by Carole Pateman, as a ‘necessary evil’ that protected women from rape, due to the assumed uncontrolled sexual needs of men (Pateman, 1988) or as an outcome of poverty (Kong, 2006). Nowadays, prostitution is considered as part of the international sex industry which is estimated to move 52.000 million dollars a year across the globe (Villa and González, 2006). It is not until recently that debates considering prostitution as a form of work or not have emerged, as I will show in chapter 3.

In the next section of this introduction, I will draw general lines about Nicaragua and about my fieldwork in order to serve as background information.

1.3 SOCIO ECONOMIC DATA

Nicaragua has a population of 5.1 million habitants and it is the third poorest country in the whole American continent. The present situation of poverty and economic

² The prefix ‘pro’ meaning ‘in public’ and the root ‘statuere’ meaning stand.

inequalities of the country can only be understood by paying attention to its recent history, which I am about to explain briefly.

After 43 years of conservative dictatorship of the Somoza family, whose regime was allied with the United States and involved privatisation and expropriations of lands, came a terrible earth quake in 1972 that destroyed part of Managua and forced the government to order the evacuation of the centre of the city³. The capital was desolated and a general state of insecurity and thefts emerged. This period was followed by 10 years of revolution and war, ending with the victory of the revolutionary, called the Sandinistas. So, it is said that the earth quake was a symbol of the end of Somoza's era. In the 80's, the Sandinistas were initiating to rebuild the country and introduce egalitarian laws to their people (Tully 2007, Alvarez 2000, Gariazzo 1991) and started a massive alphabetization, which can be observed today in Nicaraguan's high alphabetization indexes.

However, by that time the United States imposed an embargo in the country, what Nicaraguans call the "*contra* war" which caused thousands of deaths. According to Noam Chomsky⁴, Nicaraguan per capita deaths caused by Americans in that period was equivalent to 2.5 million. of North Americans. The country was in a critical economic state and the government had to devaluate their currency, which lead to a general inflation in Nicaragua's economy. People started voting again for the right parties, which have been governing from 1990 until 2007. In 1998 the country was again destroyed by a natural disaster, the hurricane "Mitch" which caused 3.800 deaths and 1 billion dollars in damages⁵. On the 5th of November of 2007, the Sandinistas were elected again and Daniel Ortega is the current president.

The years of wars, natural disasters and the "embargo" from the US altogether plunged the country into a state of poverty. It was estimated that in 2001, 42.6% of Nicaraguan population lived with less than 1 dollar a day (UNIFEM, 2005). This data places the country according to the first Millennium Development goal, –that of eradicating poverty– as extremely poor. In addition, UNICEF data also shows great economic inequalities perceived in the fact that nowadays, 45 per cent of the whole income in the

³ <http://www.nodo50.org/espanica/historica.html>

⁴ <http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a8711.html>

⁵ <http://lwf.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/reports/mitch/mitch.html>

country goes to the richest 10 per cent of the population⁶. If we go beyond this definition of poverty in strict economic terms and measure poverty as the lack of resources to participate fully in a society, then we would unfortunately realize that Nicaragua is poor in many more senses. This can be observed in the fact that according to the UNDP, in 2008 Nicaragua was out of 179 countries the 120th in the list of the Human Development Index⁷; as this index takes in account not only economic, but also educational and health measures.

The Nicaraguan population is mainly mestizo (Amerindian and white) at 69%, being 17% of Nicaraguans white, 9% black and 5% Amerindian⁸. More than half of Nicaragua's population (53.2 %)⁹ is under 18 years and the reality of many of these children and teenagers is somehow problematic. Although education is compulsory according to the Nicaraguan Constitution, data from UNICEF suggests the tough situations for many children in the country. School attendance in primary education is 79%¹⁰ and children tend to spend an average of ten years to finish their primary education, when in reality this period should be last no more than six. In fact, only 29% of Nicaraguan children finish elementary school¹¹, and according to UNICEF¹² this data is clearly related to child labour for 167.000 children and adolescents; and also to teenager pregnancies as adolescent pregnancies report for one of every four births¹³, and girls often drop out from school when they are pregnant.

There is a situation of inequality between women and men in the country in most spheres, except that of adult literacy rate and enrolment ratio in schools where the number is equal¹⁴. This is said to be due to the efficiency of the alphabetization programme in the 80 s. In spite of this, inequalities still persist. This can be shown for example in the employment's ratios and also in the data concerning violence. In the first case, the World Bank estimated that the women's labour force in the country was, in 2004, 30%¹⁵; although that number doesn't take into consideration informal work and

⁶ <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nicaragua.html>

⁷ http://hdrstats.undp.org/2008/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_NIC.html

⁸ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/nu.html>

⁹ <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nicaragua.html>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ http://hdrstats.undp.org/2008/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_NIC.html

¹⁵ <http://devdata.worldbank.org/genderstats/genderRpt.asp?rpt=profile&cty=NIC,Nicaragua&hm=home>

house work. In addition, the unemployment rate in urban areas is 44% for women and 26% for men. However, the joblessness for women is lower than men's in the informal sector¹⁶.

A second sphere in which inequalities can be perceived is violence. Unfortunately, the data concerning this issue has shown to be influenced by the fear of the women to report violence and therefore varies depending on the database. In fact, "*mujeres en red*" a feminist cyber-newspaper states that between 30-53% of adult women in Nicaragua have been physically abused, whilst only 10% of those have reported it¹⁷. Having found no actual official data, I did discover that in 1993 police reported that 30% of all the crimes committed in the country were due to violence against women¹⁸. Additionally, in 1998 Endesa estimated that 28% of the women had experienced some kind of violence, either sexual, physical or psychological (CEPAL and UNIFEM, 2005).

To conclude this section and in relation to prostitution, in Managua which has 1,093,760 habitants¹⁹ there are estimated 2000 prostitutes²⁰. It is believed that 40% of them are minors²¹ who work averagely 24 hours per week in the streets and earn 3 dollars per hour²².

1.4 SHORT INTRODUCTION TO MY FIELDWORK AREA

Given this problematic situation of children in the streets, violence against women, sexual exploitation and poverty in Nicaragua (CEBS and Mary Barreda, 2006), there are several NGOs that have been raised to improve these conditions. In Managua, one of them is CEBS, the NGO through which I got to know my informants. CEBS is a Christian grassroots initiative that was developed after the civil war in order to help the poorest people when the state could not or did not want to afford it. In the words of its leader the priest Arnaldo Zenteno, they serve as a "*religious effort of bringing justice and peace to the poor people*" (Zenteno, 2008).

¹⁶ http://www.gtzgenero.org.ni/conferencia/2_11_3.pdf

¹⁷ <http://www.nodo50.org/mujeresred/spip.php?article883>

¹⁸ http://www.gtzgenero.org.ni/conferencia/3_2_4.pdf

¹⁹ <http://www.xolo.com.ni/nicaragua/demo/managua.asp>

²⁰ <http://archivo.elnuevodiario.com.ni/2002/abril/17-abril-2002/nacional/nacional3.html>

²¹ <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/nicaragua/prostitucion.htm>

²² http://www.ocavi.com/docs_files/file_550.pdf

According to him, what they have achieved so far is to work for a greater awareness among the women about their sexual health and the creation of groups for leisure activities between mothers and children in order to let them spend more time outside home in a safe environment.

The CEBS run several projects, most of them related to women and children. During my fieldwork, I worked on two of these projects. One of the ventures was the “Samaritanas” which helped women-who-prostitute, ex-prostitutes and their families. The other project was “La Casa Hogar”/ the “House-home”, which assisted girls that were at serious risk from prostitution and had been raped or battered by family members. My fieldwork was realized in both centres from the 11th of June until the 10th of September, as I will explain in detail later. Both centres were in Managua, the capital, and were financed by external organizations.

To conclude this chapter I will now give a brief overview of this study. The thesis is organized in 9 chapters. In the next two chapters, chapter 2 and chapter 3, I will describe the literature I have read in order to write this thesis as well as specifically mention the feminist literature and debates related to prostitution. A special mention will be given to the gap in research that this thesis seeks to fill. Chapter 4 will deal with methodology and ethical issues, and in chapter 5 I will explain the theoretical tools I have employed in the empirical chapters: chapters 6, 7 and 8. In the empirical chapters I will analyse the life stories of different informants; although in each chapter I have chosen two to be the main ones. Chapter 6 will consist of an analysis of the life stories of teenagers that are in high risk of starting to sell sex. The main topics of discussion will be that of the adult management of their bodies, their internalization of gender norms and their reasons to or not to start selling sex. Chapter 7 will explore the life stories of women-who-prostitute who are currently in the streets. The main topics of discussion in this chapter will be the tension between their mothers and women-who-prostitute identity, their motives to start selling sex and the way they name themselves as women-who-prostitute. Chapter 8 will address the life stories of ex-prostitutes. The main topics of discussion in this chapter will be their history in and out of prostitution, the way they name themselves as women-who-prostituted and their future expectations. To conclude this thesis chapter 9 will address the general and final conclusions that will finish in a debate concerning feminist’s thoughts.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I will mention relevant studies I have made use of in this thesis. Given that my informants are teenagers and adults, I have used quantitative studies about sex behaviour among different age groups in the country. I have also employed qualitative studies concerning gender norms and ideals, including sexual behaviour and prostitution. Finally, I have used ethnographies on gender and prostitution around the world. I will explain all of them briefly.

3. 1 GENDER INEQUALITY, SEX, PROSTITUTION AND TEENAGERS.

According to CEBS, the NGO I was working in, prostitution in Nicaragua has to be understood as an outcome of poverty, social injustice and the patriarchal system in the country. They put their emphasis on the fact that most prostitutes begin working when they are teenagers and conclude that Nicaraguan society tends to have double moral standards towards women and girls that can be regarded in the issue of prostitution condemning and demanding them at the same time (CEBS and Mary Barreda, 2006)

With regard to teenagers, after a survey of 841 people in Nicaragua, Rani and her colleagues found out that Nicaraguan teenagers had internalized Nicaraguan unequal gender norms (Rani, Figueroa and Ainsle, 2003). The results of this survey showed that boys polled were somehow pushed to have sexual relationships before marriage, whereas a Nicaraguan girl's sexual life tended to be actively discouraged. Concerning gender inequality and in agreement with these results, Berglund and her colleagues found similar results by using focus group discussions with 29 teenagers in Nicaragua (Berglund, Liljestrand, Marín, Salgado and Zelaya, 1997). This group of researchers focused on teenage pregnancies, which have increased in the last years and is a topic that I discuss here in relation to the life stories, because four of my main informants were teenage mothers. According to these authors, the increased number of teenage mothers is due to the lack of sexual education, to poverty, to school dropouts and to the necessity of unwanted girls to belong to somebody. Their research also suggests that there is a double moral standards in girl's sexual education; signifying that they are influenced by what they called "the virgin Mary syndrome", which means that girls are taught to learn to be good women and to be chaste, learning at the same time to be good

mothers. Abortion is illegal in the country and this research illustrates the influence of the Catholic Church on how teenagers are taught that pregnancy is not a trouble, but a gift from God. To conclude, these authors showed that from an early age, teenager girls have internalized their future role of mothers and they sadly conclude that being a mother is for some poor girls the only possession, the only possibility to have something, which they give as explanation of the increased number of teenage mothers.

Concerning prostitution, the CEBS and the other NGOs that work with this theme state in their book "*En la Garganta*" that within this context of injustice, there are risk factors that lead girls to start prostitution which may vary from teenage pregnancy to poverty, sexual abuse or having been abandoned by their families (CEBS and Mary Barreda, 2006). These results coincide with the findings of Sandoval-Vera, a Chilean feminist who propose that there is a relation between child prostitution, poor families and children in the streets (Sandoval-Vera, 1990). This perspective on prostitution is also illustrated in two researches that have been published by different Nicaraguan feminists: Norma Moreno's and Johanna Alarcon's.

Norma Moreno, in her book "*Alas rotas*" (Moreno, 2006) reflects upon how social institutions like the State, the church and the schools in Nicaragua have influenced the sexual violence and machismo of the country and relates this to the existence of children and adult prostitution. She interviewed women-who-prostitute, politicians and random people and came to the conclusion that, in the case of teenagers, prostitution cannot be considered as chosen freely, as prostitution in general shows the privileges of men. In relation to her interviews of politicians, she concluded that the Nicaraguan law system was updated in relation to prostitution and sexual exploitation according to the World Human Rights and Children Rights laws. However, she was also concerned about the fact that in reality, those laws were not known by all the government and ministry workers. With regard to the 105 ordinary people she interviewed for her book, Norma Silva concluded that most of them had a prejudicial view towards prostitution as a necessary evil or as a sin. Finally, in regard to the 11 women-who-prostitute she interviewed she concluded that: most of them wanted to do another thing (91%), did not have primary education (81%), had been raped when being kids (91%), had suffered from intra-familial violence (100%) and had started prostitution before 13 years old (81%) due to economic needs (46%), rape (18%) or because of the intra-familial

violence (18%). After her study, Norma Silva assumed that prostitution is a violation of women's and girls rights. In relation to this, but in a less politicized discourse, Johanna Alarcón and her colleagues (Alarcón, Tenorio, Martinez, 1999) made 100 interviews with different women-who-prostitute in Managua. Even if this research was made 10 years ago, the results of these interviews are really remarkable and significant for this thesis. What is interesting about this research is the fact that they asked women-who-prostitute if they considered themselves as workers or not. 34% considered they were, whereas 58% did not consider themselves as workers and did not think of prostitution as an arena to demand workers rights. Aside from this, they asked them what they would need to get off the streets: 54% answered a decent job while 28% responded a man who would help them economically. Finally, another interesting aspect of this research is the fact that it shows how some women-who-prostitute share the prejudices about prostitution that society has. This was illustrated in many examples, such as 43% of the interviewees' thinking their job as not important at all or 33% thinking that men want them because their wives cannot please them.

3. 2 ETHNOGRAPHIES

Ethnographic work made in Managua has dealt more with gender norms and ideals than with prostitution itself. Anna Johansson, who wrote the book *"The suffering women"* (Johansson, 1999), explores how gender is linked with the classic theme of the private and the public spheres. It can be seen in her observations that the street is a man's realm and undertaking a task is the only valid reason for a woman to be outside the home. After her fieldwork she concluded that Nicaraguan women had a discourse of suffering, as in other Latin-American countries. This implies that women claim moral superiority by stressing their experiences of suffering. Contrary to this position, in her book *"Negotiating love in post-revolutionary Nicaragua"* (Hagene, 2006) Turid Hagene declares that as for her informants in the Esperanza cooperative, she did not find a discourse of victimization, but of courage and resistance.

Both Hagene and Johansson have agreed on the fact that gender relations in the country are clearly shaped by the absent fathers and by the importance of motherhood (Johansson 1999, Hagene, 2006, Gariazzo, 1991). Turid Hagene has taken this argument further and drawn four main characteristics of Nicaraguan's gender relations, which will be applied here in this thesis as background context. As for Hagene, the cult

of motherhood, the preponderance of female headed-households, the aggressive masculinity and gender based violence are the main characteristics of gender relations in the country (Hagene, 2006).

In this thesis, a special place has to be given to violence since all my informants suffered from some kind of aggression. In her two papers Mary Ellsberg and her colleagues (Ellsberg 2000, 2001) show how the socialization of men and women in Nicaragua is influenced by “machismo”, and how one third of their 100 women informants thought alcohol was the reason of men being violent and another third considered that it was because of men’s jealousy. Similar findings have been obtained by Mo Hume (2008) in El Salvador. She argues that women’s bodies are less valued than men’s and are even less appreciated when they start having sex. She states that violence against women has become bound to masculinity to a certain extent, being tolerated from an early age.

To conclude this chapter I will introduce the four ethnographies I have employed and learnt from in writing this thesis which deal specifically with prostitution. Sophie Days’ “*On the game*” (Day, 2007) explores the different identities among women-who-prostitute in London and she relates it to their public and private arenas. Day states that the contradiction between the oppression of the State and the freedom of the Market in regard to prostitution is at the basis of the stigma attached to it as well as to the denial of rights for the women. Her main claim in the book is the need to consider prostitution as sex work and the need to give rights to sex workers. Even if the economic and social contexts of England and Nicaragua are far from the same, Day’s use of the private and public tool in relation to prostitution has been very helpful in this thesis and has influenced partly my way of exploring the data.

From a very different context, Bethlehem Tekola (Tekola, 2002) has written a very engaging ethnography about three women-who-prostitute in Ethiopia. Her main point was to give voice to the silent, as in her country research about prostitution has always been linked to research about Aids, therefore women-who-prostitute have not been properly considered as subjects of research; but as Aids propagators. Her main contribution in regard to my thesis is her descriptive and narrative way of writing.

Lorraine Nencel (Nencel, 2001) was very descriptive too in her book *“Ethnography and prostitution in Peru”*. She spent 1 year undertaking participant observation in Peru, but was unable to do life interviews. In her book she tries to avoid occidental feminism approaches to prostitution –which I explore in the next chapter– by calling her informants “women-who-prostitute”. She decided not to refer to them as ‘prostitutes’ because of the negative connotation nor as ‘sex workers’, as she considers that such labels undermine the fact that poverty is at the basis of women engaging in prostitution in Peru. I have borrowed this conceptualization from her, as I will explain in the next chapter. Her main contribution is, in my opinion the opening of the debate concerning occidental feminism and prostitution in Peru since, as that which occurs in Nicaragua, the social and economic context cannot be compare to those in the North.

Finally, I have found only one ethnography about prostitution in Nicaragua by Susanne Adahl (Adahl, 2001). Inspired by the classic theme of the “public” and the “private”, this scholar explored how women-who-prostitute can fight against stigma by focusing on their homes and on their children. In her opinion, they do so by spending the considered “dirty money” won in the ‘public’ in their ‘private’ sphere in their homes and in their children.

My aim in this thesis is to fill a gap regarding research on prostitution in general and on prostitution in Managua in particular. Except from Tekola’s one in Ethiopia, none of the studies mentioned above considered a life story approach as their main methodology. As with Nencel, even if she did take a very interesting point in debating against considering prostitution as work in a context of poverty, as I do here; she was not able to do life interviews and she did only observation. Regarding Day, as I have also mentioned above, her brilliant work cannot be applied completely in Nicaragua due to the differences in social and economic contexts. Finally, although Adahl did ethnography of prostitution, she did not consider girls at risk or ex-prostitutes as subjects of analysis, as I have done here. So, the use of life stories as my main method as well as the inclusion of these three different groups of girls and women (teenagers, women-who-prostitute and ex-prostitutes) is intended to fill a gap in the prostitution research in order to understand prostitution from the perspective of different age-groups and with the aim of exploring the cycle of prostitution.

CHAPTER 4 FEMINISM AND PROSTITUTION

Before starting to present my research material in this chapter I intent to describe the different perspectives that feminists have developed regarding prostitution. In addition to representing an important debate, this is crucial to explain my point of departure in this thesis and to understand the debates I draw in the empirical chapters. Although feminists generally agree on the fact that prostitution can be seen as an outcome of patriarchy, scholars are divided in two main poles regarding prostitution: those treating women-who-prostitute as victims and those treating them as liberated women.

The first group of feminist scholars is named abolitionist or radical feminists and includes academics such as Mille, Barry or Pateman. Their main argument towards prostitution is that it reduces women to objects and that it violates women's rights. According to this group of feminists, prostitution reflects male dominance in society because men are taught to use women as objects to please themselves in a sexual manner (Jensen 1998 in Oriel, 2005; Scoular, 2004; Pateman, 1988). One of their arguments to support this is the extreme violence that these women suffer. In her book *"The Sexual Contract"* Carole Pateman (1988) affirms that, even if equality is stated by law, men and women do not enjoy the same rights. There is, according to Pateman a "sexual contract" that benefits men: a masculine widespread tacit contract that assures the access to women's bodies through marriage, prostitution or pornography with no condemnation from society. She criticizes what she refers to as *"neutral"* visions in regard to prostitution that speak about it forgetting that most women-who-prostitute are women who sell their bodies to men and who suffer different types of violence. Barry, a feminist psychologist, moves further in her argument, exposing that prostitution is a form of sexual slavery in which women or girls cannot change their life conditions. According to her, what makes prostitution an example of slavery is not how they started in prostitution, but the fact that they cannot quit (Barry, 1998 in Ordoñez, 2006 p.103). She underlines the importance of childhood violence and infant rape in these women's lives, in order to understand how they remain in prostitution. In her opinion, women-who-prostitute see themselves as people who do not deserve a better destiny due to a violent childhood.

When authors like Pateman or Barry adopt this abolitionist perspective they presume that prostitution is inherently exploitation and therefore assume that prostitution is essentially wrong and has to be abolished. In this way of understanding sex and prostitution, the women-who-prostitute are seen as victims of the patriarchal system which never allows them to choose prostitution freely, but rather forces them to do it.

What this group of feminists forgets is that even if there are some women-who-prostitute who have little control over this choice, there are others who choose it and get more economic power by working as women-who-prostitute. This is the main argument of the sex radical feminists or pro-rights feminists and include academics such as Kong, Overall, Juliano, Pheterson and Kesler. Their main point is that prostitution is not intrinsically degrading, that it can be chosen freely and that it has to be considered as a form of work, also in order to give rights to the sex workers. In this respect Weitzer states that most of the them do not suffer from violence and criticizes researchers that put the focus on violence and victims and end up, in his opinion, with unrepresentative samples (Weitzer, 2005). Also Kari Kesler, an ex-prostitute and feminist scholar reiterates that moral judgments of considering prostitution as “essentially wrong” are produced in the minds of the feminists without taking into account the views of sex workers themselves. She therefore criticizes the radical feminism because they speak about victims and abusers and not about what she suggests is the reality for many sex workers: that they are working in the sex industry, that they are resisting male power by having sex with more than one man and that they enjoy their work (Kesler, 2002).

According to this perspective, Kong in fact argues, after his fieldwork in Hong Kong that some women-who-prostitute that have chosen their profession can have more economic power than “average housewives” (Kong, 2006). Even if it is not clear what this author means by “average housewife”, and if his fieldwork area of China could be compared worldwide, the point is that there is a group of women-who-prostitute that the radical feminists forget: those who choose prostitution as a way of living, those who are happy with their choice, *“those who challenge the notion of proper womanhood and as subverting conventional sexuality”* (Kong, 2006 p.412) Taking this argument further in this direction, Nagle argues that the sex industry may even empower women (Nagle 1997 in Kong, 2006).

One of the central concepts that this group of pro-rights feminist is concerned with is that of stigma; first studied by Goffman, as I will describe in the theory chapter. Authors like Pheterson and Juliano for example put emphasis on the influence that the label 'prostitute' has in these women's lives. They argue that a fight against the stigma should be the priority in helping these women. Pheterson argues for example that without what she calls 'the whore stigma', prostitution would be like another type of job (Pheterson, 1996 in Kong 2006). This labeling serves, in her opinion, as a way to control women. Juliano, an anthropologist from Argentina, is also concerned with this labeling. In her two books "*La prostitución el espejo oscuro*" and "*Excluidas y Marginales*", she explores how there is a subtle violence and sanctions that mark the limits of what society is ready to accept and she relates this to the stigma attached to prostitution (Juliano, 2001; 2004). In order to reduce this violence and stigma, Juliano states that it is necessary to give rights to the women-who-prostitute.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to present practical applications of these thoughts in two different countries, Sweden and Holland. The Swedish legal model follows an abolitionist perspective. After one year of the approval of the law that tries to abolish prostitution by punishing clients and not the women-who-prostitute, the number of street women-who-prostitute in Sweden fell from 2500 to 1500 (Ordoñez, 2006). However, Luisa Ordoñez, in her book "*Feminismo y prostitución*" has argued that this model needs to be assisted by preventive projects and needs a paternalist and nationalistic State and therefore cannot easily be imported to other countries. Moreover, the fact that the number of street workers has decreased does not mean that these women have left prostitution. This point was also noted by Sophie Day in the case of London in her book "*On the game*" (Sophie Day, 2007) where she declared that after trying abolitionist measures in London, women-who-prostitute moved from the street to more private venues.

In contrast, pro-rights feminists want to give rights to these women. The legal system of Holland follows this perspective, where women-who-prostitute can work as autonomous workers and have legal and sanitary rights. However, and given the fact that most women-who-prostitute are immigrants, this law is limited because these rights only benefit Hollanders or migrants who are legal in the country, but do not apply to the illegal ones. What is more, this law has produced a black market in which some women

remain, without being able to work legally or without wanting to be. It has to be noted that this discussion regarding identity, legality and rights of prostitution has an occidental origin. So that, when we feminists talk about considering prostitution as a form of work or not, we are in fact analyzing it from a western viewpoint that cannot necessarily be applied to the rest of the world. Thus, it is necessary that this question is raised in the Nicaraguan context and by Nicaraguan feminists.

In the case of Nicaragua, Nicaraguan scholars and feminists follow an abolitionist approach. The CEBS²³ and Mary Barreda argued that prostitution is a situation in which girls and women are sexually exploited (Mary Barreda and CEBS, 2006) and calls these women and girls “*mujeres en situación de explotación sexual comercial*”, which in English would mean “women in a situation of sexual commercial exploitation”. The reason of doing so is that they believe prostitution is never a free choice, but reflects a situation of injustice that has lead these girls and women to be working in the streets. With reference to this, Norma Moreno in her book “*Alas rotas*” (2006) considers –as I have already mentioned in the previous chapter– in line with Carole Pateman’s thoughts, that prostitution is an example of the ways in which men can access women’s bodies. Nicaraguan feminists, as far as I know, would never call them ‘sex workers’ because they believe that legalizing prostitution would be like legalizing a crime. However, as I will stress in the empirical chapters, my informants did not called themselves “sex workers” and never would they named themselves “women in a situation of sexual commercial exploitation”.

This naming debate will be commented throughout the whole thesis, because it was very relevant during my fieldwork. There was not a common understanding between the actors in this field (NGO workers, priests and nuns, women-who-prostitute, families etc) in the use of terms. Furthermore, as I have suggested previously, there is not a common understanding between feminist scholars, neither concerning how to call the women nor how to address prostitution as a gender arena.

To conclude this section, it is essential to point out my own position in this area and how I will name my informants throughout this thesis given that, in this context I

²³ Mary Barreda is another NGO that works with prostitutes in Managua. CEBS “Grassroots ecclesial communities” were the NGO in charge of the Project I was working in.

consider the use of terms reflects one's ideals and beliefs in regard to prostitution. First of all, I have taken into account that feminist scholars in English language call people-who-prostitute either 'sex workers' or 'prostitutes'. Nevertheless, I also have to respect that Nicaraguan feminists would probably be upset if I call them 'sex workers' or 'prostitutes' because they believe –and after my fieldwork I understand why– that calling them workers underestimates the social and economic injustices that have brought them to work in the streets; whilst this also underestimates the fact that most women started prostituting when they were minors. Finally, I have also taken into consideration that the women did not have a common way of referring to themselves and the use of terms would vary from 'women from the streets' to just 'women'. However, they would not use 'prostitute' or 'whore' or 'women in a situation of sexual commercial exploitation'. So, I have found myself in a dilemma while writing this thesis, because there is not a word that can describe them without a political or a stigmatized connotation.

In view of this, I have decided to use the term "sexual exploitation" when dealing with minors in prostitution, as it is referred to in International Laws. I will also use the term "Sex workers" however, but only when they use this word themselves. Finally, the terms women and women-who-prostitute²⁴. I will use most often in this thesis. I personally believe that those terms are the best options allowing me to respect the opinions of Nicaraguan scholars and the NGO workers themselves. Nevertheless, I am not using their terms either, as using "*women in a situation of sexual commercial exploitation*" is marked with a view of the women as victims which, after the life interviews, I am not completely comfortable with. I will illustrate this in the next pages, which portray women with a lot of courage and women who did not find prostitution as necessarily negative.

I end this chapter then by apologizing to those who may be upset by this decision, but as I have said, it has been a very difficult aspect in writing this thesis.

²⁴ I borrow this label from Lorrain Nencel which she used in her ethnography in Peru as I mentioned in the last chapter.

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

5. 1 INTRODUCTION

My fieldwork in Nicaragua took place from the 11th of June 2008 until the 10th of September 2008 in Managua, the capital. In these three months, I worked with two projects the “Samaritanas” and “La Casa Hogar”, which deal with prostitution in different ways and which are interconnected as they are both part of a bigger institution, the CEBS²⁵. In the beginning I had only planned to work in “Samaritanas”, as it was more directly involved with prostitution; but, as I will explain later, I ended up working in both projects.

The first project in which I was participating was called “Samaritanas”. This venture works with women who are, were or could become involved in prostitution. It is also concerned with the families of these women, trying to prevent that their children follow their example. The “Samaritanas” project has been running for 12 years. Their main objective is to help these women reconstruct their lives by focusing particularly on their self-esteem. As it reads in the brochure of the project: *“To contribute for the reconstruction of the lives of teenagers and women at risk or in sexual exploitation through an integral way”*

The “Samaritanas” project involved a range of different activities including: family visits, law and medical assistance and workshops for women, teenagers and children. They dealt with different topics depending on the age: women’s rights, sexual behavior, contraception, self-esteem, creativity, teenager pregnancies, handicrafts, games and sports. Wednesdays and Thursdays nights –from 8pm until 11pm– the workers and volunteers would walk or drive through two of the main focal points of street prostitution in Managua, giving the women condoms and chocolates. They called these trips *“Salidas a Focos”*²⁶. There were two different routes²⁷: the “poor route” and the

²⁵ CEBS stands for “Comunidades eclesiales de Base” a Christian grassroots initiative in which projects I was doing my fieldwork.

²⁶ The literal translation would be “trips to the spotlights”, because the women stand in the street near spotlights to be seen. I call them in English “Night visits” or “Night walks”.

²⁷ I will preserve the anonymity of these women by changing the name of those streets and routes. So, I will call them from now on the “posh route” and the “poor route”, because one of them took part in a posh area of Managua and the other one in a very dangerous and poor one. When going in the “posh

“posh route”. The main objective of these trips was to learn how the women were coping, whilst it also represented a first approach and contact with women who did not know about “Samaritanas”.

Throughout the 3 months stay of my fieldwork, I participated in everything I was allowed to do. In the beginning of my research I was rather restricted compared to the end of my stay when I was thoroughly involved. This included being allowed to go to the Wednesdays and Thursdays “*Night visits*”, to be present at family and medical appointments and participate in all the workshops and even have an active role rather than just observing. In fact, due to my background as a psychologist, they asked me to arrange some workshops on gender and sexuality and I also arranged a workshop in laugh therapy. As I will come back to in the section about methodological challenges, building trust with the women was very difficult for me because they only came once a week to the project and because they had some bad experiences with a previous researcher a few years ago, which made them suspicious of my intentions. On such an occasion, the researcher took pictures of them while they were working in the streets without permission. Because of these difficulties, I had to wait almost 2 months to start with the interviews. I played the guitar, I made magic for the children. I had to put all my efforts into showing them I was trustworthy. Finally, I was able to create confidence and in the end I was able to conduct the interviews with the women and their families. Furthermore, my camera was stolen in the first month, so in their eyes I had no possibility of repeating that offence. This was one positive result of the theft.

The second project in which I was participating was called “La Casa Hogar”/“The House-Home”. “La Casa Hogar” is a house into which the Ministry of Family Affairs sends girls that have been abused, in most cases by their family or neighbours. It is therefore considered that they cannot live in their own homes any longer because they live in extremely problematic conditions. The girls stay in the “House Home” for months or years depending on the changes in their family home, on the verdict of her trial –if they have– on their family situation or their development in the house. So, “La Casa Hogar” becomes these girls’ new home until the Ministry workers decide

route” the stuff would be walking since it was safe; while when doing the “poor route” the stuff would not get out of the vehicle, as it was very dangerous. I was sent some days to one and some days to the other route in order to observe and learn about both contexts.

otherwise. The objective of the project is *“The transformation of the lives of the teenagers that have ended up in a serious situation of psychological damage”* (Codemi, 2003). In the attempt to accomplish this, they arrange workshops, handcrafts and Christian group’s sessions, for those who desire it. Psychological help is also provided.

As a result of the free time I had in the first few months, and as a way of thanking the CEBS for allowing me to investigate in one of their projects, I asked them if I could do volunteer work in la “Casa Hogar”. As I am a psychologist, my role in the project was to do some workshops in sexual behaviour as well as in self-esteem. In the end, I also organized sports and gymkhanas. The outcome being that I had a very close bond with the girls all from the beginning, and I experienced these relationships to be very warm and fulfilling. It was not until the middle of my fieldwork that I thought about including the “House Home” girls in my research, This was because most were considered to be at risk from prostitution –as I will show in chapter 6– and because research so far, has not linked teenagers at risk with current women-who-prostitute, as I pointed out in chapter 2.

5.2 GATEKEEPERS AND FIELDWORK

In order to get background information and be introduced before the interviews, I had several so-called “gatekeepers” among the workers in the projects. The main ones were “Samaritana’s” coordinator, Lourdes, the social trainer Saddi and Marlene, the coordinator of “La Casa Hogar”. Even if I mention only 3, many people helped me throughout my fieldwork and interviews. This involved including me in discussions, explaining the customs and celebrations in Nicaragua, inviting me to their homes to eat and sing, driving me, taking away my louses and nits or even killing the rats in my room.

Lourdes, the “Samaritanas” coordinator, introduced me to the women and family members in an embarrassing moment at a general meeting one Friday morning, in which I had to talk in front of everyone about why and what I was doing there, while everyone was eating cake and celebrating a girl’s anniversary. Lourdes also advised me and revised my interview guide before starting with the process of interviewing the women. On many occasions she also kindly drove me to some of the women’s houses.

Without her help, even if it cost me some embarrassing moments about which I can laugh now, interviewing the women would have been impossible. My second gatekeeper is Saddi, who help me greatly when visiting the families. Thanks to her I could see the women's homes, interview some of them, and I could share her Friday workshops with the children. From day one, my third main gatekeeper, Marlene gave me freedom to do workshops and interviews with the girls from the "House Home". She not only allowed me to conduct the interviews, but also encouraged me to do so, thinking that it would be important to include teenagers in the research and hear their life stories.

5.2 METHODS

Although my main methods were participant observation, focus group discussions and life-story interviews, I will start this section by mentioning briefly the ways in which I acquired background information during my time in the field.

I was able to have informal conversations and an interview with the priest coordinator of The CEBS, Arnaldo Zenteno. He was one of the two forerunners of the "Samaritanas" project and he told me about the history of Nicaragua and how the projects were designed accordingly. I also had a very good relationship with the "Samaritana's" workers with whom I had extremely interesting informal conversations about prostitution. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to read and photocopy some documents of both projects and some studies and booklets that were previously made by "Samaritanas" about sexual exploitation. I was also in touch with a feminist organization in Managua "*Puntos de Encuentro*" that provided me with feminist's documents from the country.

Concerning my main methods, I will start by outlining my use of participant observation. Participant observation is not only considered as a way to obtain information, but also a way to produce data thanks to the reflexive process between the researcher and the participants (Ameigeiras 2000 in Vasilachis 2006). In the beginning of my fieldwork, I primarily did participant observation which as I have pointed out before, became more active and interesting as time went by. Since I was dealing with a sensitive topic, I thought observing was a good way to start –and for a while it was the

only thing I could do—. In the end, it helped me to prepare for the interviews by building trust with my informants. Through participant observation, I gathered important background information about the women's family, their notions of being a woman and about men, marriage and also prostitution.

When using focus group discussion, I applied this technique both with the adults, teenagers and pre-teenagers of the “Samaritanas” project, and with the girls in “La Casa Hogar”. My intention of using focus groups was to gain access to their beliefs about womanhood and manhood. I think this information could be better obtained by using this method than with a private interview, for the reason that one of the main benefits of using focus groups is that people build on each others responses and come up with information that would be less accessible without this group interaction.

Sadly, as this thesis has a maximum number of pages, I do not have enough space to comment the results as thoroughly as I would like to, although I will briefly mention some in the empirical part.

Finally I will describe here my main tool in this thesis which is life story interviews. Charlotte Linde (1993) describes life stories as the stories and connections that people express when telling about their lives. The use of life stories has the advantage of stressing the point of view of the speaker. Social scientists use life stories not only to look at individual concrete cases but also to express and explore thorough an individual life, issues and problems of society (Gullestad, 1994). Hence, life stories can be used to analyze how people construct their identity as well as how do they construct and experience their world and may give important information about society.

I had several reasons for choosing life stories as my main instrument of work. First of all, using this method was a way of attempting to understand my informants through their own words, especially considering that identity can be perceived as the story we make about ourselves (Sharim, 2005). As identity is something we continually construct and reconstruct throughout our lives, life stories were used in order to gain information about my informants' lives, which I consider more suitable for my intentions than using a formal structured interview. Second, in dealing with such a sensitive topic, I considered essential to let the informants choose the themes they would like to talk

about or not. To facilitate this, the use of life story was required because of its open character. Third, as my knowledge of this field of work and of Nicaragua was basic before travelling, using life stories prevented me from being prejudicial and of interfering in posing questions with my occidental point of view; whilst letting them play a more active role in the interview. Fourth and finally, the use of life stories can be a way to give voice to silenced groups in society (Ameigeiras, 2000). Women-in-prostitution are one of those silenced groups.

Although I had prepared an interview guide, I usually did not pose many questions but generally let the informant speak freely throughout the interview. As I was recording the whole talk, my attention was directed towards our conversation which made the whole process more personal and intimate.

The interviews with the “Samaritanas” women took place either in the project building, or in their homes, depending on availability. I always tried to hold the interviews in their homes so that they would feel more comfortable and I would get a better perspective of their lives. There were only 3 informants whom I did not know before the interviews. Lourdes, the coordinator and my main gatekeeper, chose them because she had a good relationship with them. In la “Casa Hogar” the coordinator Marlene and I asked the girls to participate and almost all of them wanted to. All of the interviews in “La Casa Hogar” were conducted there and I knew all my informants in advance.

Although I am mainly referring to six main informants in this thesis, I held 30 life story interviews with the participants who were part of “Samaritanas” and “La Casa Hogar. Four were woman-who-prostitute, four were ex-prostitutes, eight were family members of the women (sisters and daughters), one was a boy who was not related with prostitution at all –something I discovered later–, eight were girls at risk of being prostitutes from La Casa Hogar, two were girls from “La Casa Hogar” who were not in serious risk –something I also discovered later– and two were teenagers-mothers who were adults and had been considered at risk girls in their past, but had not ended up in prostitution. The reason of choosing six life stories to present in this thesis has to do with the limited page count and my wish to present their life stories in a narrative way and give a fuller picture of their lives. Furthermore, some interviews were not so relevant for my topic, although they helped me to understand better the notions of

manhood and womanhood and gave me some useful background information. The six main informants have been chosen because they spoke about prostitution more thoroughly in their interview or because they are involved to a larger degree within it. Their invented names are: Venancia, Dulce, Zenobia, Gioconda, Aura and Rosa Argentina²⁸. In order to analyze the material, I have transcribed and translated the whole interviews and divided my 6 key informants into 3 different groups according to age and life situation, that is: at risk teenager girls, women-who-prostitute and ex-prostitutes. I have chosen this way of analysis in order to investigate the cycle of prostitution by seeing it through the experiences and perspectives of different age groups. This division will be the backbone of the empirical part of the thesis.

5. 3 METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

The greatest methodological challenge I encountered throughout the whole process concerned my role as a researcher. I felt guilty sometimes because the stories of my informants were very emotional and very hard, and in response I could not do anything but just listen. Although as a psychologist I am prepared to listening, I had serious frustrations in not being able to help them more. One of my biggest challenges in the whole process was not to cry during interviews and not being able to help them to solve some of their problems, but being there as someone that could only give temporary love and hope.

Another methodological challenge concerned the sample, as the sampling of my informants has not been random. It would probably have been better to randomize the sampling, but it was impossible. The time was short and I had never been in the country, therefore I did not know anyone in Nicaragua before travelling there. I spent 2 months trying to become trustable, partly due to the unethical behavior of the previous researcher, whilst partly because it always takes time to build trust. In the end, I had little time to do the interviews. It could have been better to do more than one interview with my chosen women; however, I decided I would rather have more of the shorter interviews with a variety of women, instead of fewer but longer interviews with fewer women. Besides, and regarding the “Samaritanas” participants, I always had to go with

²⁸ Their names are invented in order to preserve their anonymity and have been borrowed from important women names from Nicaraguan history.

someone from the project in the venue's car, so organizing arrangements became difficult. Therefore, some of my decisions were based on this timing issue. As a final point, it has to be noted that this sample is clearly influenced by the fact that all the informants are somehow involved in the organization, above all those informants related to "Samaritanas" project. So it cannot be said that they represent prostitution in Managua as a whole.

To conclude, and even if I think that life story is the most suitable method I could use in order to write this thesis, it has two big disadvantages in relation to the validity of the data. Life stories are influenced in many ways and change over time. According to Mallimaci and Giménez (2006) it is important not to forget that interviewees do not describe "truth" but interpretations of their lives, of their own small pieces of "truth". Therefore the data is based on stories that have been transformed and biased throughout the interview and throughout their lives. One of these biases is social desirability, when people lie in order to make a certain impression and to achieve coherency. As a result, I tried to prevent this by asking again when things appeared to be contradictory or by asking my gatekeepers.

5.4 ETHICAL ISSUES

Before we start, I must mention that I have been very careful with the ethics in this thesis due to the sensitivity of my topic of research and of the life stories that I explore here. In this last part of the chapter I will point out the ethical aspects that I have taken into account within this research. Firstly, my intention with writing this thesis, as I have already mentioned in the introduction, is to help to improve the lives of my informants by producing knowledge about their circumstances and assigning a social value to this kind of research. Secondly, all of my informants knew that I was there to investigate and an informed consent was given by all. Thirdly, I have tried to develop my fieldwork in a less intrusive way, in order not to harm my informants. Lastly, I have tried to use my informants' conversations and life stories in this thesis in a respectful, non judgemental and responsible way.

Nonetheless, there are some ethical issues and challenges I faced that have to be discussed here, before I start to analyze the data.

Participation involves diving into people's reality (Mallimaci and Giménez 2006), and I was very lucky to be able to participate and “dive” into all of Samaritana's and “La Casa Hogar” activities. However, I was constantly feeling a tension between being involved and trying to keep distance. I was not 100% a volunteer because I was doing research, but I was not 100% a researcher either. I had a multiplicity of roles. For example, when I was participating in some of the workshops I was neither a volunteer nor a researcher. Furthermore, my particular background as a psychologist may have influenced my participants. On the one hand, it may have helped them to speak more openly with me and to be able to build a bond between my interviewees and me; but on the other hand it may have created some confusion or some hopes for change that I could not accomplish. Nonetheless, I never hid my research intentions –they all knew– and I was very concerned with being ethical and honest with them.

As I have pointed out before, my main ethical discussion relates to the “Samaritanas” sample. Lourdes was with me in the interviews with the women-who-prostitute and she was also the one who introduced me to the women. On the one hand, having a gatekeeper was the only way to access the informants, but on the other hand I felt that being with her gave me the power to be trusted. The women-who-prostitute told me their stories, but we will never know if they felt indirectly and subtly forced to do so because of the power of my gatekeeper who coordinated the venue.

To conclude, and in relation to “La Casa Hogar” sample, I was a volunteer there until the end of the second month when I was informed that one of the primary objectives of the venue was to prevent the girls from being sexually exploited in the streets. It was not until I spoke with one of the founders that I discovered this. Marlene, the coordinator, and I decided then, to try to include some of the girls in my fieldwork after informed consent. My role then changed, but not completely. From a critical point of view, this change of roles could be confusing for the girls, although we tried to explain to them the situation so that they could understand.

CHAPTER 5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

Prostitution, as I will discuss in the next pages, can be seen to highlight gender dimensions both as a structure and as practice. So in this thesis both focuses of analysis will be used.

On the one hand, if we focus the analysis on a structural level, gender can be understood as a hierarchical construction which ranks some individuals –men– in a higher position than others –women–. In fact, gender inequalities are so relevant in the organization of societies that some authors even consider universal the fact that women are in some way subordinated to men (Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974). This subordination brings about contradictions regarding for example the way in which modern liberal states define citizens, considering men and women as equals; while “*the dominant sexual code defines them as opposites*” (Connell, 2002 page 56). When the attention is paid to gender as a social structure, these dimensions of gender can help us examine how gender norms are expressed through people’s attitudes towards prostitution. Within this structural focus specific attention in this thesis will be given to stigma, thus it is related to these gender norms, as I will present in the next pages.

On the other hand, if we focus our analysis on gender as practice, gender can be understood as a process: the process of acquiring gender identity, of living that gender identity and in sum, of performing that gender identity (Moore, 1994) as it is also one of the factors of the transformation of physical bodies into social bodies (Lorber and Yancey 2004). For the individual person, gender construction starts with the assignment into a sex category –boy or girl–, which becomes gender through naming, dressing, and the use of other different markers (Lorber, 1994). When the focus of analysis is given towards gender as a practice, it helps to understand how informants perform their gender identity within a stigmatized role: that of prostitution or that of having been raped, as is the case of my informants.

In order to understand the cycle of prostitution, the relevance of using both dimensions –gender as structure and gender as practice– is highly important in order to understand

the difficult processes in which girls under 18 may start in the street world, continue in the streets for some years and yet, may or may not leave afterwards. It is however important to have in mind that such a division between gender as structure and practice is made for academic and analytical purposes. In real life, those aspects are highly interconnected and therefore my informants themselves do not consider them separately.

GENDER AS A STRUCTURE

As I have previously mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, my interest in prostitution was founded in the contradiction that I see in modern capitalistic societies in relation to prostitution. On the one hand, there is a demand for women-who-prostitute while, on the other hand, there are legal impediments for them to work. Authors like Sophie Day, who has also studied these contradictions, finds at the basis of these contradictions the fear of transgression of boundaries between the private and the public (Day, 1996). Day states that there is a constant tension between the regulations of the State and the freedom of the Market and between what is considered private and public. In her account, the outcome of these tensions is the denial of rights for the women-who-prostitute (Day, 2007).

Modern capitalistic societies demand that each individual is productive in order to be regarded as effective complete citizens. However, when this productivity is linked to sexuality, social norms tend to be raised to condemn it. As Kong points out “*Sex has no intrinsic meaning*” (Kong 2006 page 426), and it is society which arranges and transforms meaning for what is considered as sexuality. The legal system in Nicaragua states the right to free sexual expression, but does not specify its position towards adult prostitution. It does not say if prostitution is either legal or illegal. This uncertainty reinforces the belief that prostitution is not a way of being an economically effective citizen, but as a way of disrupting the gender ideal of what is to be a woman. As Sophie Day suggests, prostitution demonstrates how society might be scared of transgressing the boundaries between what should be private and public, by limiting women-who-prostitute' rights as workers and by trying to hide them (Day, 2007). They do so by pushing them into the margins of society. Even if Day's arguments cannot necessarily be transferred to Nicaraguan society, her insights may be very useful, as in this whole

set of contradictions we can find some of the basis which will make clearer how society deals with the issue of prostitution in general.

As I have mentioned before, my starting point in this thesis is that gender is one of the most important structures of differentiation in which society organizes individuals. According to Nicaraguan scholars, an important aspect of Nicaraguan society's organization is patriarchy (Moreno 2006, Sandoval-Vera 1990, CEBS and Mary Barreda, 2006). A society is patriarchal when more male members tend to represent and have the power compared to female. According to these cited authors, patriarchy is at the basis of prostitution in Nicaragua. Thus, I will explain its influence in different levels of society.

According to Silvia Walby, patriarchy can be traced in six structures of society: paid employment, household production, culture, sexuality, the state and violence (Silvia Walby 1990 in Connell 2002). In relation to paid employment, and as I pointed out in the background chapter, women in Nicaraguan society earn less than men (CEPAL and UNIFEM, 2005). As well as this and in relation to household production, not only do women earn less but they also spend more time doing domestic tasks (Ibid, 2005). In fact, in Nicaragua there is often an encouragement of women to remain home to perform domestic tasks and take care of the family, while men provide economically (Johansson 1999, Hagene, 2006, Gariazzo, 1991). In relation to education and culture, as I mentioned in chapter 2, women are encouraged to attend schools and learn. It is, according to CEPAL & UNIFEM (2005), the only measure in their study on gender in the country in which women are equal statistically to men. In relation to sexuality, which is one of the main structures linked to prostitution, as suggested already in chapter 2, men are encouraged to have an active sexuality; whilst women are encouraged to be chaste. In relation to The State, laws and jurisdiction, despite being presented as neutral, are in many cases not neutral at all but gendered in different ways. Finally, violence is very relevant in my research in relation to society's ideas about it, and also in relation to the individual bodily experiences, as I will present in the next section.

According to CEBS, the patriarchal system in Nicaragua tends to objectify girls and women and divides them into two opposite and exclusive poles: the good ones and the

bad ones (CEBS and Mary Barreda, 2006). As I mentioned before, previous anthropological work in the country has summarized its gender relations into four main characteristics: the cult of motherhood, the preponderance of female headed households, the cult of aggressive masculinity and the violence against women (Hagene, 2006). Concerning these general aspects and the ones already presented about Nicaraguan poverty, it can be said altogether to influence girls at risk into considering prostitution as a way out. In fact, and according to Juliano, it is considered that the more obstacles women face to find a job, the less education they have and the more social barriers they face, the bigger probability there is that they “*will end up doing rentable tasks which entail high social costs and personal risks*” (Juliano, 2001 page 12). One of these economically rentable tasks is prostitution. By street work, women can earn more than in other professions such as street sellers or cleaners. However, and using Bordieu’s conceptualization, the lack of social capital may cancel the benefits of the access to economic capital (Bordieu in Juliano, 2001). What is more, this lack of social capital is due to stigmatization. In fact, as mentioned in Chapter 3, some radicals feminist authors like Pheterson, consider that without stigma, prostitution would be nothing but another kind of job (Pheterson 2000 in Juliano, 2001).

The word “stigma” comes from Ancient Greece, when officials would make some marks on people who broke the rules or misbehaved in some predefined ways (Neuberg, and Smith, 2003). Stigma would then be the mark that could be seen from the outside and therefore differentiate the “good” from the “bad”. Nowadays, the word stigma is used to refer to more subtle and invisible marks, like that of being a woman-who-prostitute. It is considered that “*the attributes made object of stigmatization are those incongruent with the stereotype of what a given person should be in a society*” (Goffman, 1963 page 25). In his classic book “*Stigma*”, Goffman presents his main theory concerning stigma and his main thesis: societies stigmatize people who do not follow a pre-established model of what a person should be. Moreover, he underlines the importance of being ‘normal’ for an individual’s identity (Goffman, 1963).

Thus, if society’s model of woman is that of dependent and fragile (and as I have said before, in Nicaragua the ideal of woman is highly linked to motherhood and to “the home”) the model of ‘the prostitute’ is incongruent with this ideal. The ideal woman, using Mooser’s conceptualization of the Triple Roles Framework, is that of the one that

focuses her role in the reproductive tasks and not so much in the productive ones. The Triple Roles Framework is another analytical tool that, in relation to my data, has come to be highly relevant in my analysis. The framework names 3 kind of roles: reproductive (taking care of the children and domestic work), productive (activities by which people earn money) and community roles (the collective means of production and community organization). The point of departure for this framework is that even if women and men are generally engaged in some of these roles, this engagement is gendered and not symmetrical. In fact, women in general face triple roles to a greater extent than men (Mooser 1992 in Kabeer, 1994). Given that women in Nicaragua are encouraged to develop reproductive roles in their home, women-who-prostitute then disrupt the scenario and disrupt societies' implicit norms of what a woman should be and what ought to be separated as public and private. Sex is subsequently seen as a private thing that should not be sold and should not become public. Sex should remain private, especially concerning women. Regarding men's sexuality, society encourages them to have as many sex partners as possible (Mo Hume, 2008) and encourages them to be involved mainly in the productive roles and not in the other two types.

According to Juliano, an Argentinean pro-rights anthropologist, there is a symbolic violence towards women that pressures them to follow these pre-established gender norms and ideals. This violence can be less subtle and people can be openly stigmatized in cases like prostitution. As for Juliano, this violence serves to distinguish and clarify which femininity and masculinity is desired by society. An example she illustrates in her book is the analysis of the insult "puta/whore" (Juliano, 2004). This insult can be considered as one of the worst –or the worst– words you can call a woman. Even women-who-prostitute themselves do not use this word. When calling a woman a whore you are labelling the complete whole of herself and thus insulting her in a very real sense. Juliano points that however, there is no such a word for men, or at least not with the same negative connotation. Interestingly, one of the worse –or the worst– words you can call a man is that which insults his mother –indirectly insulting woman but not men– by calling her whore: "hijo de puta/son of a bitch". What this example suggests is that prostitution rarely refers to the sex industry but rather to the widespread idioms that involve morality (Day, 2007). Additionally, the stigmatization can be regarded also in a wider perspective through which we can see that the women-who-prostitute are often

considered 'deviants' and consequently, they will carry this label over all spheres of their live (Adahl, 2001).

Stigmatizing women-who-prostitute serves three different objectives in the words of Dolores Juliano: differentiating two kinds of women ('good' and 'bad'), marginalising the 'bad ones' and freeing society from its responsibilities (Juliano, 2001). Given the importance of these objectives, I am going to introduce them all.

First of all, stigmatizing women-who-prostitute serves to separate the two kinds of women: the good and the bad. That differentiation subtly reminds the first group about the limits of their behaviour. In order to be 'normal' they have to be 'good' in opposition to the 'bad' group, which serves to produce a gender hierarchy (Kong, 2006). This is an example of the violence I have already mentioned that is at the basis of the gender system. The second objective of stigmatizing women-who-prostitute is that it marginalizes the 'bad' group; it silences them and renders them in a high status of defenceless. When women-who-prostitute are seen as the 'bad' group, and more generally when people are stigmatized, they are not considered to be adults with full dignity and respect (Goffman, 1963). In consequence, the legal and social system tends to push them to the margins. Thirdly and finally, stigmatizing women-who-prostitute seems to free society of all responsibility. Rather than admitting the fragility and contradictions of the social norms, prostitution serves as an arena in which gender norms can be confirmed and reproduced for the whole society. I have already mentioned that the majority of women-who-prostitute in Nicaragua start to work in the streets when they are minors. Interestingly and sadly, society condemns these women and girls, yet does not condemn a system in which girls can drop out of school for long periods without punishment. In fact, this poor attendance standard is one of the main risk factors that encourage girls into street life and one of the factors that keeps women-who-prostitute in the streets. If they do not have any education, what other means of earning money can they achieve?

As I have discussed here, prostitution shows a tension with respect to gender roles and ideals which is resolved by the stigmatization of the women-who-prostitute, instead of the clients/abusers or the system. Prostitution also reveals something about gender as a hierarchical structure which defines the kind of ideal women that should be 'produced'.

This ideal woman is opposite to the women, the women-who-prostitute are supposed to be because of their work. These tensions undertake notions of power. As Connell points out, power is broadly diffused and the more diffused, generalised and invisible the more 'normal' it is perceived and the more difficult to challenge or resist (Connell, 2002). Despite the invisibility of these dominant gender ideologies (Foucault, 1972) they can be distinguished if we analyse them carefully in relation to the experiences of the individuals.

GENDER AS A PROCESS

Having analysed gender as a structure and the kind of woman and girl that Nicaraguan society demands and rejects, it is necessary to understand which mechanisms are involved in the appropriation and performance of these gender norms and femininities by individual women. In order to understand this, I will use a framework that can deal not only with the stigma and the social norms commented before, but also with the individual identity and experience, that is The 3 Bodies Approach by Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987). Within this framework, the body –or what these authors call the 'mindful body' as they state that body and mind are inseparable– is not only seen as a biological object, but also as a symbolic, social and political one which is culturally produced as well as influenced by its historical moment. The 3 Bodies Approach is useful in my research as it permits to take into account this body history as well as the importance of the stigma that 'impregnates' my informant's bodies at all times.

The 3 Bodies Approach outlines different dimensions of the body: the individual body, the social body and the body politic; which I am going to briefly explain here.

The individual body is considered to be the lived experience of the body. Among the strong bodily experiences that are related to my informants, to be raped, to be violated or to be battered are experiences which are suffered by the individual body. Within these experiences, the body is treated as a thing (Connell, 2002) and these are experiences that, as we will see in the life interviews, will mark those girls and women's lives for ever. The individual body could be linked to the ego-identity as discussed by Goffman. That is, the part of identity linked to what is experienced individually, with everyday challenges and stigmas (Goffman, 1963).

When the framework further includes the so called ‘social body’, it implies the cultural constructions of and about the body. This could be linked not only to gender identity in general as I have discussed in the last section, but also to social identity. Women-who-prostitute have to deal with the cultural constructions regarding their body and how they are considered; two aspects that are intrinsically related. In a more general sense these women have to deal not only with those horrible experiences against their person’s bodies, like rape for example; but also with how society views them afterwards and how they are often devaluated. This understanding of the social body could be linked to how women’s bodies are often less valued than men’s (Mo Hume, 2008).

Finally, the model includes the “body politic”. This dimension of the body represents the regulation, surveillance and control of the bodies. Although I am not going to mention it very intensively in the empirical chapters, this dimension helps to explore how the police and the justice system treat women-who-prostitute, girls at risk and ex-prostitutes. So, it helps to understand the notions of the body held by the political and legal power.

In conclusion, the three Bodies Approach can be a useful framework in this thesis because it can include how gender ideology, discourses and violence shape the individual bodies, which will be appreciated when we see examples of stigma. Furthermore, the framework can also adequately suggest how individual people face gender identities by sometimes admitting them, sometimes contesting them.

Now I am going to relate this last part of the chapter to how individual people perform gender. Even if the concept of gender deals with cultural and social implications, as I have pointed out in the last section, it has also a subjective dimension linked to identity (Sharim, 2005) which is both constructed and lived (Moore, 1994).

Discourses and social practices about gender may influence individuals in a singular way. Specifically, “*the discourses about sexuality and gender frequently construct women and men as different sorts of individuals*” (Moore, 1994 page 50). However, those discourses tend to be contradictory within themselves and also in relation to the social structure of gender. These contradictions produce tensions as I have presented before, such as of being a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ woman. Regarding individuals, it may seem

as if we all have only one identity. In fact, due to the stigma suggested in the last section, some stigmatized groups like that of the women-who-prostitute who are easily categorized into just one fixed identity. However, in reality, due to these contradictory discourses, we tend to have not only one unique identity and subjectivity, but multiple ones and therefore multiple subjectivities (Moore, 1994). Even Freud, recognized that a person is often developing at the same time in differing directions (Connell, 2002). This Multiple Subjectivities framework by Henrietta Moore is another theoretical tool that I am using in analysing the empirical chapters, because it helps to understand how a person can assume various identities without necessarily feeling she is not the same person. Within this framework, a person is then constituted by various subject positions which defines ones ego-identity.

What makes the case of prostitution interesting is that the social stigma attached to it makes it very difficult for the women to build in the eyes of the social more than one identity apart from that of being just a woman-who-prostitute. Prostitution remains to be seen as a form of sexuality rather than a form of work (Day, 2007) and it impregnates the whole person. So, even if women-who-prostitute are also mothers, sisters and women; and they actually take those subject positions, their job –and what people think of them or their ‘social identity’ – is what mostly determines their identity in the eyes of others. As Kong points, “*The prostitute stigma works between the working person and the public self of good women and wives*” (Kong, 2006 page 423). So, the stigma attached to prostitution provides woman who are working in the streets with a social identity that conceals their other more private identities, like that of being a mother, a woman or a worker. Above all and concerning the participants of this case study, the stigma is even greater due to the fact that even prostitution itself has its own hierarchy; street prostitution being ascribed with less status than indoors ones (Kong, 2006).

What is really interesting concerning prostitution is that while women-who-prostitute have a stigmatized social identity, clients are allowed to have a positive one that in general, is not attached to any stigma. As I have pointed out in the previous section, stigmatizing the women-who-prostitute serves to ignore the other part of the sex industry: the clients/abusers. Understanding the perceptions about them can give us highly interesting insights into dominant masculinity. Concerning this, Pheterson summarized “*She is bad for what she is; he is bad for what he does*” (Pheterson 1996 in

Kong, 2006). The way clients are perceived tends to criticize and blame women-who-prostitute at the expense of their social identity. In Nicaragua, where prostitution is neither legal nor illegal²⁹, the legal system indirectly condemns the women-who-prostitute themselves, not their clients by not explicitly suggesting its position towards prostitution.

Furthermore, the force of the stigma can be so powerful than even stigmatized people may agree with their received stigma (Goffman, 1963). This happens in cases of gender, social and political norms that are so powerful, that individuals also believe that they are the ‘bad’ ones, therefore accepting their stigma.

According to Adahl, as their social identity is so stigmatized, a way in which women-who-prostitute may strengthen their other subject positions is by improving their ‘private’ sphere. This is the sphere by which woman can gain respect, as I have discussed elsewhere. A way to accomplish this is by spending their money in their home and on their children (Adahl, 2001) and more generally by becoming mothers. As the home is considered to render women their self-respect, they may try to separate their public identity in “the streets” as women-who-prostitute from the private one as mothers in “the home”; through improving the conditions of their homes and by so, highlighting their reproductive roles. However, this strategy may be accompanied by the social exclusion that these women often face by neighbours and sometimes even family. As I have pointed out before, women-who-prostitute have to deal with the fact that even if they gain access to economic capital, they may lack social capital due to stigma.

What remains interesting about the focus on prostitution that I explore here is whether ex-prostitutes, as I will illustrate in the next chapters, continue to experience and live with the stigma. Should this be the case, understanding how all of the participants fight against this stigma will provide opportunities to get some insight surrounding gender norms, gender identity and gender socialization. All this will be debated in the next pages.

²⁹ As said by Rosaura, one of “Samaritanas” workers, Nicaraguan Constitution states children prostitution as illegal; but does not specify about adult prostitution.

CHAPTER 6 THE LIFE STORIES OF TWO GIRLS AT RISK.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this first empirical chapter I will illustrate the life stories of girls who are considered to be at risk of becoming sexually exploited and therefore were sent to live in “La Casa Hogar” by the Ministry of Family Affairs. Two mayor points will be emphasized here. First, the use adults can make out of girl’s bodies and second, the future expectations of these girls.

“La Casa Hogar” was located in the north of Managua in what is considered to be a dangerous neighborhood. The institution had a very big space consisting of 4 one-floor small buildings, whilst the rest of the area consisted of small trees and sand. The people working in “La Casa Hogar” were the director, a psychologist, one volunteer and 5 educators. There was a metal fence surrounding the area as well as one guard protecting the girls and the buildings with a shotgun. Everything was locked, for example the kitchen, the food, and even the staff’s toilet, as the workers were afraid that the girls would steal something. Nonetheless despite the security system, two of the girls escaped during the months I spent in Managua and just before I returned home, one was raped by a neighbor near the main building. When I arrived, there was approximately more or less than 25 girls being looked after in “La Casa Hogar”. Most of them had been raped and beaten by family members. The Ministry of Family Affairs had sent them to "La Casa Hogar" in order to protect them. One of the main assumed risks was to become prostitutes. The girls would stay there on average, for a period of some months or until their family situation had improved. However, some of them were there for more than one year. During my stay in Managua, most of the girls said that they felt “imprisoned” in that kind of atmosphere and complained about it.

From the 15 life interviews I held in “La Casa Hogar”, I have chosen 2 girls as my main informants in this chapter: Venancia and Dulce María. Venancia is a 14 year-old girl who has been in La Casa Hogar for 1 year and was one of the “veterans” there. Dulce María did not remember her age; and the staff considered she was not more than 13. She had been some months in “La Casa Hogar” coming from another institution, where she

had been 1 year. Dulce's case is interesting, above all, because her mother was a women-who-prostitute and had tried to convince Dulce of doing the same. She, as Venancia, had suffered from physical and sexual abuse. My decision of choosing these two life stories was based on the fact that not all the interviews seemed relevant for my research interests and because they were the only ones who had relatives involved in prostitution. Dulce's mother was a woman-who-prostitute and Venancia's sister is currently sexually exploited on the streets. This family link with prostitution is important because according to Nicaraguans NGOs it may represent another risk factor for minors to start being sexually exploited on the streets (CEBS and Mary Barreda, 2006). In addition to this, both their life stories are relevant because in spite of having suffered similar physical and sexual abuses in their early childhood, both informants life stories shows many nuances and differences. This is evident in the fact that one feels secure in the institution, whilst the other does not; one believes in her future, the other does not and one thinks about the possibility of prostitution, the other does not.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1 Past: Family abuse, rape and lack of education.

When asked about their lives, Venancia and Dulce spoke about it with grief. They both stressed their experiences of being raped, beaten and unloved. Both had large families (Venancia 11 siblings and Dulce 7) and their parents did not fulfill their responsibility roles. Moreover, they did not find a family member who would protect them or believe them. I will start the analysis of their early childhood by stressing their experiences of abuse, because both laid emphasis on it throughout the interview.

2.1.1 Venancia's and Dulce's life stories.

In the case of Venancia, she was raped by her father, her two brothers and by the second husband of her mother. She calls her mother "ill"³⁰ and in one part of the interview she says that she gave her mother medicaments. She and her mother suffered violence from their family members, who would also occasionally tie them to the bed. Additionally, even if they both suffered, her mother did not support or protect her –emotionally or

³⁰ It is assumed by the interview that that label "ill" means that her mother was mentally ill

physically– as she would also hit Venancia. Surprisingly, when she spoke about these incidents in the interview, she was laughing. Due to the fact that her main family cares did not look after her, Venancia would go to her grandmother’s home in order to eat, therefore skipping from school. In the moment of the interview she was some years behind school and being 14 she was learning how to write.

V.- ³¹Lots of things happened to me out there. Bea, I took drugs. I have taken all the things, drugs, cocaine... and... my mother would hit me (Laughing) and I would not pay attention to her...My father raped me 5 times and... [...] later they interviewed me and took me to my mother’s house. There, I was with another stepfather of mine and he also abused me [...] and later I was abused by one of my brothers [...] and as she (her mother) is ill... when she was cutting muffins, she would want to throw stones everywhere, ill. And I used to give her pills. Now I think my mother likes sleeping in that market (Laughing) [...] I was in school and she (her mother) would come and pick me from there with a belt, with a belt, but I would go to my grandmothers house so she would give me frijoles³²

After being several times raped by her father, Venancia escaped and lived in an empty house feeding herself only with mangos. She lived alone until an old women found her. What is worthy of note here is to acknowledge that even though she did not find support in her mother, but rather in a stranger; Venancia would later insist on living with her mother. The idea of a “mother” figure seemed to be more important than her bad experiences with her. We see a similar issue in Dulce María’s case which is even more evident and will be discussed in a few moments.

V.- that woman I think she is not my mother, -I would say to myself... that woman is not my mother... Why then is she taking care of me? I would say. Then, I would say, better to look for my mother. Then I went to look for her, being 13. I went to look for her and then my mother beat me because I had been with my father.

Her father was also not supportive for Venancia. When she spoke about him in the interview, she named him “slimy”, showing big resentment towards him. After escaping and living with her mother, she would again suffer rape but this time from her stepfather. She explains the rape in this instance, as a matter of circumstances and not as something he carefully planned and not as something she could have avoided. What can be seen in this example is first of all, how her girl’s body was treated as a thing and second, how she perceives her stepfather’s desires as uncontrollable.

³¹ All the references had been translated into English by me as Spanish is their mother language.

³² ‘Frijoles’ is the typical Nicaraguan food consisting in rice and beans. It is what most of the people eat there everyday.

V.- Then my stepfather arrived in the night looking for a mecate³³, a mecate for tiding my mother. And because my mother would not have sex with him because she slept in another place... She slept in another place. Because I am the daughter of another man, he raped me.

When asked who was guilty of all that had happened to her, Venancia replied that her parents were. In the focus group discussion with these girls however, most of them thought that what had happened to them was their own fault. Venancia is an exception to this concept and in regards to the interviewees, because she did not blame herself. Drugs were part of Venancia's early childhood. In the interview she explained to me how she had tried cocaine and marihuana, and how her mother had given her guaro³⁴. When Venancia speaks about drugs in general, she seems to see the fun aspect of them and, in this part of the interview, she was laughing while remembering the effects.

V- Because they abandoned me. In my notebook I have everything (she has been writing in a diary since she arrived to the "Casa Hogar")... why I am here... Why am I here? Because of maltreatment, because of rape, for everything, because of drugs (Laughing). My mother would drink guaro. My mother drinks and she would give me...

If we switch now to Dulce Maria's case, as I have pointed out before, she also suffered from rape and sexual abuse, but not all of the perpetrators were adults. She was molested by her sister and raped by her cousins. In addition, she was also molested by a neighbor.

DM.- And, I would grow... with... abuses from my cousins, my sister, the lesbian neighbor, and my mother maltreating me everyday...

Her mother wanted to sell Dulce when she was young. During my stay in Nicaragua, I could appreciate that this was an unfortunately common situation for some women and girls, as I will show in Zenobia's life story in the next chapter. Their mothers, having no money, would sell their daughters to men. They would then work for them and behave as adults: cook for them, clean the house and have sex. Dulce María said she was thankful to one of her sisters, because she convinced her mother not to sell her.

DM.- I am grateful to my sister, because my mother was going to give me away, she was going to sell me, but my sister did not want her to. If she had not been here, I would have now been with other people.

³³ A 'mecate' is an object which is used to train horses.

³⁴ Guaro is the cheapest alcohol drink that can be found in Managua. It is normally made with sugar cane, but in order to reduce its price it is sometimes made in clandestine ways. It was reported in the newspapers, that two years ago in Managua, certain producers used methanol, so the guaro became really cheap. The effects of this falsified drink were devastating and some people even died. However, even if people drink the "real" one made with sugar cane, when kids the effects can be devastating too.

Dulce said that she was afraid of her mother because she would beat her everyday, burn her and sometimes made what she called “an inspection”. While I was in the venue talking with the girls, it appears that several of them suffered from that kind of “inspections” from their mothers. They would inspect their daughter’s genitals to see if they had had sex. In the case of Dulce María, as with many of the other girls too, their mothers suspected them of having sex with their mother’s partner. It seems that simply their “female body” was sufficient enough to create suspicion. Neither their word nor their age was relevant. It was them to blame, not their partners. It seems that in their mother’s eyes, they were responsible for their –supposedly active– sex behavior and so, a potential threat to them. Their mothers acted as if childhood did not exist and they saw their daughters as adults in relation to their perceived needs. However, at the same time, the girls were not treated as adults concerning their bodies, their autonomy and their rights. It also seems that the man’s role in this situation is deliberately forgotten, as is evident in this extract of Dulce María’s interview.

DM.- Look Dulce Maria I want you to answer me to just one question... yes or not... did you slept with my man?” “What?- I said- sorry?” “If you are or not having sex with my man?”. I felt bad because I would never do such a thing to my mother, because I know that is bad, so I said to my mother “No mother, I don’t do such a thing because I know it is bad and you are my mother... I never do such things”...My mother told me to tell her again “Kneel down”, I did and afterwards in the room, she would be hitting me with the stick of the broomstick. Afterwards, she pushed me into the bedroom, she took away my clothes, and then... my own mother... I will never forgive all of the things my mother would make me... inspect me, and later she beat me with a grander... I couldn’t bear it... My body could not resist more, and as I wouldn’t resist I lied to my mother “Yes it’s true”

Although Dulce did not trust her mother and would not tell her about her personal abuse, she knew about the rape of her small brother. Dulce was especially concerned about this because it was her youngest brother who was raped by an older brother. Her mother was sad about the situation and she told Dulce that it would have been better if it had been her and not her brother who was raped. This quote exemplifies quite well what seems to be an undervaluation of women’s bodies.

DM.- My mother, before I came here, was going to send my brother to jail, my mother was very sad like me, and then she told me “Look, daughter of a bitch, thousand times I would have preferred that you would have been raped”

It can be appreciated in the interview that Dulce’s mother sold sex and that she would ask her daughter to have sex with old men and gain financially. In Dulce María’s explanation, her grandmother had done the same with her mother. It is interesting to see

that when I asked Dulce about a term for that, she replied she did not know and right afterwards she said she loves neither her mother nor anybody.

DM.- My mother she was a ... my mother would give me guaro, would send me men... she would tell me to look for men... In the streets. I didn't like it.

B.- What did you do with the men?

DM.- Nothing, I never paid attention to her. When she was a kid my grandmother sent her too...

B.- Did she have sex with them?

DM.- Yes.

B.- And that... how is it called?

DM.- I don't know.

B.- Is it the same as prostitution?

DM.- I think so... I don't love anybody, there is nobody I love.

Dulce did not speak about her father at all during the whole interview. It is assumed that her mother was a woman-who-prostitute and she lived with several men and so Dulce probably never met her father. When I asked her who was responsible for what had happened to her, she replied that her mother was, and thus forgetting her father's responsibilities.

DM.- When I went out of home, I always told God "I don't want to forgive my mother... it was not my little brother's fault to be raped by my oldest brother, none of my siblings were guilty, but my mother yes... because my stepfather would hit my mother and that's why my mother would get even with my brother or with me.

Similarly, as in Venancia's case, Dulce also consumed drugs. Although in the interview she only spoke about marihuana, in our informal conversations she also spoke about having consumed other drugs including cocaine.

2.1.2 Summing up their past experiences.

Both examples coincide with the framework that different NGOs in Managua use in order to study sexual exploitation towards children (CEBS and Mary Barreda, 2006). They say that Nicaraguan society treats children in an "adultistic" way, in the sense that they are treated as property of the adults and ready for submission. According to these NGOs, this must be seen in relation to the situation of poverty among many people in the country, where poor families cannot fulfill their role as providers. In relation to Venancia and Dulce it is evident that neither of these girls were supported by their families. As for the cited NGOs, this situation leads children to have the perception of

no control over their lives and to feel unprotected by adults. Many of these girls from “The House-Home” had experienced rape in their lives, which is in line with Mo Hume who states that women’s bodies are less valued than those of men (Mo Hume, 2008) given that the mayor numbers of rape in Nicaragua tends to be that of girls, although boys are also raped ³⁵ but not in the same numbers.

Due to the rape, and using the 3 bodies Approach (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987) the body suffered a physical and painful experience. The girls may have felt rape as an intrusion, a loss of control, respect and autonomy and finally even as loss of honor as their individual body was raped and was treated as a thing (Connell, 2002). But, at the same time another meaning is given on top of the physical, and that is the social and symbolic significance of the body that has been raped. Concerning the social body it is important to highlight that in Nicaragua, the social representation of the female body is one that seems to encourage virginity and so it can be perceived that the symbolic meaning of the rape nuanced between perceiving the girl as a victim but also as guilty of giving away her virginity. This is related to the double morality that asks girls to be virgin and at the same time to be there for men’s use (CEBS and Mary Barreda 2006). Virginity seemed to be a mayor concern in these girl’s and women’s life. When talking to the women-who-prostitute (See Chapter 7), I discovered that some mothers would sell the virginity of their daughters which was highly appreciated by the exploiters. It was also a mayor concern in dealing with paternity. When a girl was not a virgin, it could be used as an excuse for the boy to not acknowledge their children and therefore to not take a role of responsibility (See Chapter 8 Aura’s life story). The importance of virginity will also be seen in the next section, where Venancia insisted on saying that she was virgin before the rape.

On top of the social, another meaning of the body is linked to state institutions and the Law system. If we pay attention to the institutional arrangements regarding this treatment of girls, and even if we take into account that sending the girls to a safe place has many positive aspects, the implicit message of this arrangement is somehow contradictory. When the system does not throw the rapist from the house, but does ‘throw away’ the raped, it can indirectly influence the girls to feel guilty. In Venancia’s case, her father was still in the house and in the case of Dulce María’s, the mother

³⁵ <http://archivo.elnuevodiario.com.ni/2000/junio/26-junio-2000/nacional/nacional1.html>

continued living with some of her children. The two of them, like many others in “La casa Hogar”, were sent away from their homes. These policies have to do with the body politic (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987). Relating to this, Norma Moreno Silva (2006) made an analysis of the laws that protected children in the country, as I have pointed out in chapter 2. She conclude that even if Nicaragua as a country shares the terms of United Nations about the definition of sexual abuse (UN, 2000 in Moreno 2006), there is a big gap in between the law and what is really happening as I already explained in chapter 2.

What can be found in both life stories is the existence of double moral standards towards girl’s sexuality. We also see a view of men desires as uncontrollable, findings that also coincide with those of Mo Hume in El Salvador (Mo Hume, 2008). Women are then, the ones that have to control themselves and stop men by not acting in provoking ways. In this respect, the statement about Dulce’s mother who beat her for supposedly having had sex with her man is very reveling. Both girls also explained that their mothers did not care in their eyes that they had have bad past experiences. Family support of the victim is essential when adapting to this kind of trauma (Berglund, 1997), surprisingly neither Venancia nor Dulce blame their mothers directly for not supporting them. This means that they indirectly accuse others of their mother’s misbehavior. Both also seem to forget to mention their fathers, as if mothers were the only ones responsible of their sons and daughters. To conclude, this part of the chapter shows how the body of these girls is defined and violently “managed” by others and how they may have less autonomy concerning their own bodies than they ideally should have. Despite their young age, these girls seem to be learning to tolerate violence against their bodies.

2.2 Present

2.2.1 Institution

The institution “La Casa Hogar” had very rigid habits. Everyday the girls got up at 5am and started cleaning the house. Each girl was assigned to clean specific parts; so the whole venue was completely cleaned every day. Besides, the task of food making was also assigned. Every month two girls were responsible for lunch and another two for dinner. They would be supervised by what they called an “educator”, who was in charge of taking care of the girls and paying attention to their tasks within the house and who

would also sleep there with them. After cleaning, the girls would have breakfast and leave either to school or to a practical institution. However, when they were just sent to the House, the girls would skip from school for one semester. This decision had its basis in the fact that the girl would need time to recover from rape, violence or drugs, depending on the case. But it somehow made the girls bored being stuck in the house for months with no special obligations apart from that of cleaning and cooking. At 1p.m everybody would be in the House again to eat lunch and afterwards they had to sleep “siesta”. In the sleeping time –both the siesta and night time– the bedroom location was locked with padlocks, so the girls could not leave. Leaving would result in punishment of not being allowed to go out on the weekends³⁶. In the afternoon, the girls would clean their clothes or do homework. Some afternoons a missionary-nun would come to have conversations with them, sing songs or watch films. And one day per week a woman would come to teach them to do handicrafts. At 6pm they would eat dinner and go to sleep at 9pm, at the latest. The “House Home” had an agreement with a practical education centre that was also part of “CEBS”. They could send the girls there for free and they could learn beauty, bakery, computers or cash registering. All of the girls attended one of these courses, mainly in the weekends, for it was thought that learning some skills would prevent these girls from being women-who-prostitute in the future.

Every girl knew why she was there and why the others were there. Some of them were grateful and some wanted to escape. During my stay in Managua, I met some girls who ran away. When they did so, the manager would call the police and try to look for them for a while –one or two days–. However, neither the House nor the police seemed to have enough time or resources to search intensively for the girls, so they would stop and new ones would move in, as “La casa Hogar” was considered to be one of the best and biggest places for at risk girls in Managua. The project would lose track of previous girls and move on.

As regards to their general feelings towards the house, both Venancia and Dulce seemed to have different points of view. When talking about the institution, Venancia pointed to a tree which was her favorite spot in the House. There she would feel safe, she said. In general, Venancia felt positively about her stay in the “House Home”, although there

³⁶ Going out in this context meant that girls could go to church, to buy food for the week or to visit somebody with Arnaldo, the priest (the manager of all the projects).

were moments in which she felt bored. In contrast, Dulce did not feel comfortable in the House. She would suffer from psychosomatic pain and she said that the other girls would make fun of it. Furthermore, the educators had learnt to ignore her pains and as a result she felt they did not care for her. Several times during my stay she would consider escaping, but she never did so. In the end, the only family member she could rely on was her grandmother, who was too old to take her in and look after her. The alternative was to go to live on the streets, which she sometimes thought of as a good option, as we will see later.

As I have pointed before in the case of Venancia, both girls had a contradictory vision about their mothers: one that could be regarded as the ideal one and one that could be perceived as a more factual one. In Venancia's case, we can see this because she blames the institution "La Casa Hogar" for separating her from her mother; and she seems to forget how her mother would abuse her, offer her drugs and not take care of her.

V.- Yes, when I was with her (her mother) they were separating me... and now they are separating me. Now I feel sad, I feel alone... with nobody, without sisters and father.

In Dulce's life story we can see similar contradictions throughout the interview and above all when she talks about the "House Home". It is revealing to hear how Dulce talks about her mother, because when she talks about her in the past, as we have read in the last section, she speaks about her lack of care. However, when she is asked about the institution, she compares it constantly with her mother, and this time placing her mother in more positive lights.

DM.- If my mother notices the things that are happening here. Uuuuuu... honestly she would bitch the educators, the same with Marlene, my mother would send the educators to jail... she would not stop and send them to jail [...] I know that my mother loved me and she gave everything to me and, honestly, here they have trouble when giving me food and soap for cleaning my clothes.

It was interesting for me to see that the girls did not share a common group sisterhood of protection, which maybe could have reflect their lack of family care. Instead, they were very competitive towards each other. In the middle of my stay in Nicaragua I wrote in my fieldwork diary the story of two girl friends: Tanya and Marta. What made this couple of friends different was the fact that they were really generous with each other, they slept together in the same bed and they spent all the time together. Since I met them, both seemed happy in the House. Things changed when the other girls and

even the educators started to call them lesbians. Then, Tanya suddenly stopped to talk to Marta because she did not want the other girls to offend her. What this story shows is how stigma can be used to control people. The stigma attached to lesbianism, which is not seen as an ideal femininity, was for Tanya much more important than friendship itself. So, following the gender ideal and the way it is supposed to be performed seems to have been more valued than her only friendship.

The ideology of the House Home regarding the contact with boys was rigid too. Concerning the fact that most of the girls had been raped, the girls were not allowed to talk or play with their male neighbors while staying in the House. However, as the girls were aged 13-16 years old, many were eager to talk with the boys and many were in love with a neighbor, often the same one, which carried sometimes big fights. Some of the girls would skip the rule of avoiding boys and would talk to them through the metal fence. Even if the rule seemed rigid, the fact is that, days before I left one of the girls was raped by a male neighbor.

To sum up, within the institution the girls were also learning how femininity and masculinity was supposed to be performed. They were asked for example to clean the house, to cook and to clean their clothes. And so, they spend most of the days undertaking these tasks; tasks that can be seen as reflecting Moser's Triple Roles Framework re-productive roles (Moser 1992, in Kabeer, 1994). The girls were also learning how to behave with men in a passive way: ignoring and escaping from them, as if manhood was something naturally and inevitably characterized by violence, from which girls should escape.

2.2.2 Sexual exploitation

Even if in the moment of the interview none of the girls were involved in sexual exploitation, they can be considered at serious risk of it. After my informal conversations with the girls I got to know that some of them were tempted to do it, although only 2 or 3 spoke about it frankly in the taped interviews. One of these responses was from Dulce. As I have said before, her mother would tell her to find men and get some money, although she said she never did so. When she was living with her mother she thought about becoming a "*prostitute*" and escaping from her, but she reconsidered it in the end. Dulce said that there was no point, because nobody was

going to love her as much as her mother did. In this example it seems that escaping from the lack of care was the main reason for starting selling sex; and it also shows how, to her understanding, a mother's love is the best and biggest love anybody can have and so she does not hope to have more than her mother gave her.

DM.- I was going to get out of here with a girl who is called Elizabeth because all of the girls there are... well prostitutes. I was going to get out with her because... for the same, because I didn't stand my mother, better... I would say... I don't love my mother, I don't love my family, and I don't love anybody... but I thought, what for?... It's not worth it, because nobody is going to love me as much as my mother did...

Another time in which she declined a similar offer, she was living with her mother and walking with her sister.

DM.- After a gorgeous car arrived, a man went out of the car and was calling both of us, he was calling us and later my sister said "Lets go where that man is" "No, I replied... you will see that something bad will happen if we go". Finally, well... I went with her and we got into the car [...] that man was offering us 300 dollars for me and for my sister [...] He said he was going to take us to a shop and then home... and then to his home, in a plane... far away... he was going to talk to our mother... but I told him no... no no... if I wouldn't have told him no, I wouldn't be here and I wouldn't be bearing her (her mother)

Even if Dulce before had declined many times the offer to sell sex, she was at the time of the interview, reconsidering it again. She did not have money and she was bored of dressing in the same old clothes. It seems that for her, the only solution was to engage in prostitution although her discourse shows some contradictions.

DM.- Sometimes I have the temptation of asking men for money like my mother used to do, but I would never... Someday honestly, I am going to do it to get out of here... because here I do not have anything, I am fed up of wearing the same clothes, I don't have my mother to give me things. It is worse here.

Her opinion in relation to women-who-prostitute and prostitution appears contradictory. Even if in the example above she is thinking of earning money in this way, when asked about it in the abstract, she shows a rational point of view of not doing it, which could show the social stigma and prejudices society has placed upon women-who-prostitute.

DM.- (talking about women-who-prostitute) they should go on with their lives, shouldn't be in that, because by being in that they pass us Aids... to us...

Switching to Venancia, she appears to feel negatively towards prostitution. This can be seen in two examples. The first one is that she openly insults her sister, who is been sexually exploited; not thinking about doing the same by any means. In this part of the interview we can see how she deeply shares the idea that people-who-prostitute have

just one fixed identity that, as I pointed out in the theoretical section, appears to impregnate the understanding of their whole persona, their whole body and identity (Adahl, 2001). The second example of her negative beliefs towards prostitution is linked to her rape and her hate towards men.

V.-(Laughing) my sister is a prostitute. I didn't like my sister because she was a whore, a bitch and a prostitute. She sold herself to men. She was 14, and my mother sold her. My mother sold her when she was young. She was sold to a man that sold her to a woman. That's why I called her whore, bitch, and prostitute. Now she is still there.

B.- Have you ever thought of doing the same?

V.- No, and I will never do it. I am going to be a nun. For not being with men, for not ending pregnant. Look at my sister, one of these days she is going to have a baby.

When considering what she said about her sister, it is interesting to see again how she idealizes her mother. The mother was the one who sold her sister, but Venancia blames her sister who, at that time, was too young to make such a big decision as if it had been her sister's wishes. It is also remarkable to see how she thinks that the only way to avoid bad men and pregnancy is to become a nun. It seems that she feels so unprotected in relation to men –remember she was raped by her father and by her step father– that only by confining herself –in a passive way of behaving– can she feel protected. When asked about her opinion of men, she openly refers to sending them to “*la mierda*” (literally “to the shit”, which in this context, can mean the same as go to hell). However, right afterwards, when asked about how she sees the ideal man, she says that she is “*going to look for*” a warm and respectful one.

B.- Why do you think men rape women?

V.- (Laughing) because they feel like to, they feel like doing it (laughing). Who knows... look at me... I was virgin (laughing)... seriously... I was virgin. I never let anybody touched me, but one day they chained me... my mother was chained too. Once they chained me... my father... the one that died...

B.- What do you think of men?

V.- They may go to “la mierda”, may they don't think about me because I am going to be in a convent.

B.- How would it be you ideal men?

V.- I am going to look for a nice and tender one. I am going to look for someone who is nice with me and respectful. If not, I will throw him out of the house. And being pregnant I am going to take care of the baby alone... and another man will pick me here... and I will throw him out... I am going to have the baby alone when I will be pregnant... I will give him milk... the one my parents never gave me.

In Venancia's opinion, men rape because they feel like doing it, as if it was something that they could do whenever they want. However, in her ideal future she is going to find a man to be a father, but not an engaged one. This example shows the vision that many of these girls have about men, what Turid Hagene called the "absent men" (Hagene, 2006 page 16). This is, men who do not take care of their children, and in this case men who have made them suffer and whom they expect to suffer from in the future. This also illustrates how Venancia seems to have a view of men as producers of children, rather than one of raisers.

Summing up, I have presented here some risk factors in the lives of these girls that make them vulnerable to sell sex such as: lack of love in their family, lack of support, experiences of violence and rape, a history of prostitution in their families, drugs, lack of education and poverty. To end this section, it is important to analyze their self image in order to understand the potential risks to enter into sexual exploitation. In regards to what Barry states concerning the connection between self esteem and prostitution, as I presented in chapter 3, whether girls and women think of themselves as essentially valuable or not can be determinant for entering or not into the sexual exploitation world (Barry 1998 in Ordoñez, 2006).

At this respect, Venancia compares herself to Cinderella who first lacks everything and cannot move on because she is recruited. Venancia also said that she would like to be like "God", to go to heaven and stop listening to the screaming. She did not specify whether the screaming were past –from her violent childhood– or present. In the present, her self-representation shows a poor sense of control over her life. Maybe this is the reason why, when she describes what she would like to be, she thinks of God, because in her imaginary He can control everything.

V.- I would be like Cinderella because she is lack of so many things, she is lacked of so many things, because she even does not have a man to whom to marry with. Like me, I don't have any... she is single... her live... she wants to move on, but as she cannot move on... then... she... has to be locked and she cries [...] I would like to be God in the Bible and go to heaven so I don't have to hear the screams (laughing)

In Dulce's case and in terms of what can be seen as her body, she is terribly damaged. She was burnt, inspected and raped. And she had many cicatrizes from these abuses over her body. When she talks about herself; she talks about her pains and her body with

disgust. In one moment of the interview she even remarks that she would have liked to be raped by some unknown boys. In her interview, it seems as if she identifies herself with her body and that she also dislikes her body. She has learnt that she and her body are not valued. What is more, it seems as if she is her body.

DM.- Sometimes I cry because of my mother... for the same things... so many things... Sometimes I think that I am fed up of so many things [...] Like last year, I was almost found by some boys, I would have liked that they would have raped me... that they would have raped me...

B.- Why?

DM.- Because if they did rape me, I would have gone away from Managua.

Dulce seems not to like herself. As she thinks that nobody loves her, she searches for love, but at the same time she mistrusts people. Given her family and personal pre-conditions and the fact that she admits publicly and during a recorded interview that she is thinking of engaging in prostitution, she seems at risk of turning to the streets. In the situation of Venancia, despite the fact that the risk may appear less evident, she is also at risk.

2.3 Future

In relation to their future, the girls have completely different points of view. Venancia's view was similar to most of the testimonies of the girls I spoke with. She wants to continue studying and she plans to have a family. When I asked her what she wanted to be when she grows up, she replied plainly "*I want to do my life*". As I have illustrated before, the lives of these girls have been ruled by a series of events over which they have had no control. Venancia also talks quite a lot about becoming a mother, again showing an attempt to find a meaning in life; one that is encouraged positively by Nicaraguan society (Hagene, 2006; Johansson, 1999). This shows, as I pointed out in chapter 2, how abandoned girls often have a need to belong.

V.- I am going to live my life,

B.- What would you like your future to be like?

V.- I want... I want to get out of here; I am going to work and help my brothers. I don't want to skip my class because I am going to be a teacher. I am going to find a job and then... money... all the money and fortune will I give it to my son. I want that he will become a good teacher. He has to move on so that, a woman will find him because it will be the woman who finds him and not him who finds her.

B.- How will you be as a mother?

V.- I am going to give him love, I will send him to school and then I will pick him in the afternoon and then I will serve him food and a glass of milk, I will breast feed him (laughs) and put him in the cradle and if he cries, goodbye...

B.- Would you give him drugs?

V.- No, I would give him advises, good ones... like “don’t take drugs because it is only for bandits, I will tell him.” I liked them before, not now”. He has to respect me, respect the educators and his nephews.

When asked about what kind of mother she would like to be, the first thing she says is that she will give her children love. Even if she theoretically thinks of behaviors that could be positive for the children, she expresses others that could be counterproductive, such as when she declared “*And if he cries, goodbye*”. It is interesting also to see the importance which she places on the notion of “respect”. She believes, her child must respect her, the educators and nephews. Again, she ‘forgets’ to mention the father as an important figure for the kid’s future development. In contrast, when asked Dulce about her future she sounded quite pessimistic. She does not hope to study or marry. She thinks both things are useless and replies while crying that what she wants is to die. This shows a high degree of frustration and a sense of lack of control that, given her life story, has created a general distrust.

B.- Would you like to study?

DM.- No

B.- Marry?

DM.- Worse... It’s useless.

B.- Would you like to have a boyfriend?

DM.- No, what I want is to die forever, that’s my wish: to die, so I stop bearing everything. My mother is calm now and me... I am crying because I don’t know what her man will be doing ... if she is hitting my small brother... I don’t know what it going on in my house.

3. CONCLUSION

The stories of Venancia and Dulce show us many things about their lives and about Nicaraguan society. First, their story of not being cared for and their experiences of rape and violence shows us a society which can treat children as if they were not children. By mistreating them and asking them for more than they can actually give, it seems they

are treating their bodies as mature, adult, sexual bodies; but without giving the girls an adult autonomy. When reading their life experiences, it seems that both girls are older than what they really are. They are not even 15 years old and they have already suffered a very disadvantaged life. Their families and above all their mothers with whom they still have contact with seem to behave towards them as if they were adults, not children. This treating the girl's bodies as adults was reflected in another life-story of a girl from "La Casa Hogar". Her name was Ana Julia and she was at the time of the interview 16 years old. She had lived with her father as her mother had disappeared, and he would buy sexy clothes for her to use already when she was just 8 years old. Afterwards, he tried to rape her and she was sent away to different institutions.

A.- He says yes, because of my way of dressing, of thinking, of acting and because of everything... I don't agree because concerning my way of dressing it was him who bought my clothes and concerning my way of acting, I am like that. Because we had problems... and it was him who bought me clothes and because I didn't go out nowhere because I didn't like what he was doing, then he got angry with me, being 2 years not speaking to me, until now... the Ministry Family Affairs has told him he has to be in charge of me, because nobody wants to, only him because he is my father... nobody told him to have a baby... then he says yes, but for him there is a 'but' not to want to be with me.

B.- Which is?

A.- Is because of the problems we had, but it's not my fault and he says it was my fault. He said I am the guilty one.

Finally, another example of the uses and beliefs of their body can be seen when the mothers believed that they were flirting with their partners, or when they do not trust their daughters when informed that they were being abused. Those mothers believe their daughters are old enough to have sex as adults, whilst they also assume that a man cannot resist their supposed insinuations. This last example indirectly shows that it is perceived that girls are the ones who actively seduce men; because they do not blame their partners. This situation will be analyzed in the next chapters too.

Secondly, this treatment of young girls as adults is anchored in the treatment of their bodies as already sexed and by the means of intrusion. This is illustrated in the case of genital inspections or rape. Rape has been a big disgrace in these girls' lives, showing us, that they suffer in different ways by using the 3 Bodies Approach (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987). This analysis shows us multiple contradictions. Even if their individual body have suffered terribly, the fact is that Nicaraguan society blames the

girls for what happened, not always treating them as victims; which can be observed in Norita's -another girl from the House- life story interview.

N.- Sometimes I feel dirty, I feel nobody loves me [...] Ugly, dirty, nobody loves me, quarrel girl, hateful, everything...

B.- Something good?

N.- I am useless [...] Something I am good at? Cleaning the dishes.

So, when she said she felt dirty, it is not only in relation to herself and her own self-perception, but also influenced by the thought of others to be compared against. Now she is not a virgin and so she is not the "ideal". So, when raped, she suffers not only due to the experience itself, but also due to what she considers the views of society. The 'social body' of Norita is perceived by society as dirty as if it was her who is to blame for what happened to her individual body.

Thirdly, their stories reveal significant gender differences in respect to gender expectations of the care-givers. The role of the absent father and of the mother as care giver is very present in both life stories and this is related to the asymmetry of gender roles (Mooser 1992 in Kabeer, 1994). In these interviews, we can appreciate how the reproductive role is very present in the views about and expectations of women's lives and totally absent in relation to men's. Even in the case of Venancia whose mother was mentally ill, she does blame her for the lack of care; but seems to have forgotten her father's responsibility. Both girls have seen males as violent, absent or abusers and they do not seem to have any male figure that can be considered helpful in their lives. This is more visible in Venancia's life story –who has a big resentment towards men– however is also significant in Dulce's avoidance relationships to boys too. Despite this, Venancia still dreams of a perfect man who can treat her well, although in her expectations, he will disappear when she will become pregnant. In relation to fatherhood, they do not blame their fathers directly –Venancia– or talk about them –Dulce–, while the role of their mothers is very present, despite both being neglecting mothers. These girls idealize their mothers by believing that they are not directly responsible for not being good mothers towards them. This idealization is quite evident above all in Dulce's case, who changes her opinion about her mother depending on the context.

Fourthly, what this chapter also shows is that gender norms are learnt in violent and dramatic ways by these girls at a young age. As a result, their identity is clearly determined by what and how others think, expect and act towards them, rather than by their personal power to choose, which is, as we have seen, clearly restricted. We have witnessed too, clear examples of contradictory subject positions using the conceptualization of Henrietta Moore (1994). Examples of this is when Venancia said she wanted to be a nun, and having a partner; or when Dulce said she wanted to sell sex in some parts of the interview and totally rejecting the idea in others.

Fifth and lastly, these girls have a very big risk of being sexually exploited if they escape and do not complete school. There is a risk that the girls can be deceived by money or by people or men who offer them the possibility of working in the streets. As I have presented here, it seems very easy to get such invitations. If so, they will earn more money –the young ones, as far as I was told, had more clients than the old ones–, but are likely to face some more troubles as we will see in cases of women-who-prostitute in the next chapters. The sexual exploitation of minors is considered to be a crime towards Children Rights. Nicaragua as a country has agreed and is signed to the different laws that pursue the Rights of Children. However, reality shows that most women-who-prostitute in Nicaragua start selling sex when they are minors.

In relation to the issue of children's involvement in prostitution, it is not possible to understand it in terms of feminist empowerment and cannot therefore be considered as work. The contradiction arrives, in my opinion, when those children are over 16 or over 18. Being teenagers, considered to be grown-ups, they are supposed to be aware of their decisions; whereas children are not supposed to be. My question is why is it decided that 18 years of age is the limit of adulthood, when they –as in both these girls' cases and the other 13 that I interviewed– have been treated as adults all their lives. My second question and concern is what happens to children's rights when they are over 18 and they are not legally considered to be children. Could sex radical feminists then consider prostitution as empowering if the girl who is now an adult is selling sex? Is it only a matter of age limits? I will try to answer these questions in the next chapters.

🌐 CHAPTER 7 THE LIFE STORIES OF TWO WOMEN-WHO-PROSTITUTE

1. INTRODUCTION

In this second empirical chapter I am about to show the life stories of women-who-prostitute who are involved to a certain extent in the “Samaritanas” project. Two mayor issues will be discussed here: the tensions between motherhood and prostitution and issues surrounding naming and labeling prostitution and women-who-prostitute.

It was my second day in Nicaragua when I was taken to see what was going to be my main fieldwork area and where I would meet my informants: the “Samaritanas” project main building. Just when I arrived Lourdes, the coordinator of the project, was waiting for me and inviting me to have breakfast with her. She interviewed me and asked me for my objectives, methods and means. I remember that she looked very serious and preoccupied. I looked younger than she expected and I inherited skepticism after unethical work of the previous investigator. The feeling of being tested was not new to me, but it somehow made me feel uncomfortable. I could see already from that first day that things were not going to be easy for me. As part of my sloppy beginning I called my participants “prostitutes”, thinking that this was the most appropriate word I could use. The coordinator then looked at me even more serious and preoccupied and scolded me politely “*We never call them like that*”. Nobody would have believed that this woman who was scolding me like a child would appreciate me so much later. I would never have imagined, that in the coming months, she would ask me for advice after such a clumsy beginning. Informally³⁷, in the “Samaritanas” project they would call the women-who-prostitute just ‘women’ or ‘women from the roads’³⁸ which was, at times confusing. When they used the term “women” I often did not know whether they were referring to women in general or to women-who-prostitute. However, by the end of my stay, I could perceive slight variations in the tone and gestures that helped to identify those differences.

³⁷ Remember “formally” they would use the expression “women in a situation of sexual exploitation”

³⁸ In Spanish they would use the expression “mujeres de la carretera” instead of “mujeres de la calle” (women from the streets) because this last expression denotes a negative connotation.

The “Samaritana’s” building had a rather interesting exterior: it did not have any visual signage or external advertisement indicating as to what kind of institution it was. From the outside looking in, it looked just like a normal family house. In the beginning, I presumed that this confidentiality was due to the fact that they were trying to give the women a private space they could use without the social stigma they suffered from the outside world. However, when I asked one of the members of “Samaritanas” about this lack of signage, I was told that this “no sign” politic was done in order to reduce crime. House burglaries were unfortunately very common. Actually, I was highly surprised by the fact that “Samaritanas” hired one man to sleep on the premises every night. His job was to protect the house. By sleeping in the building, the intruders would realize that someone was there, and so –in theory– would not enter the house. However, his actual appearance was by no means threatening, but rather quite the contrary as he looked far too friendly.

“Samaritanas” was in fact a very efficient and organized project with particularly engaged and kind workers. This included: the manager Lourdes -a social worker-, a volunteer psychologist, another social worker and 3 social trainers. I was very lucky to be able to stay with them for 3 months. However, as they were so efficient and experienced, I was not essential at all, in contrast to the situation at “La Casa Hogar” where they really needed personnel. This therefore made it harder for me to introduce myself in the field, for I was not necessary and in the beginning I did not contribute with my presence.

In this chapter I present the life stories of two women-who-prostitute in Managua: Gioconda and Zenobia. Thanks to Lourdes –the project manager– I was able to visit them in their houses. I was also able to do two more interviews with another two women-who-prostitute, the stories of whom I will come back to in the conclusion of this chapter. The reason for choosing Gioconda’s and Zenobia’s life stories is because I had longer interviews with them and also because they both spoke more openly about their lives compared to the other two. In fact, as I will comment in the end of the chapter, one of the other interviewees did not admit that she was in the streets at all.

Gioconda was in her thirties and was working in the “poor route” mostly in the weekends. I had seen her once before. Gioconda had 4 sons. In the moment of the

interview, she was with her smallest child, breast-feeding him all the time. Zenobia was 33 and was also working in the “poor route”. She worked there everyday of the week. I had seen her on previous occasions, but I had never spoken to her at length. Arriving at her place was difficult³⁹ and when we did, all of her 6 children were there coming back from school. Zenobia had a destroyed bus seat and that was our ‘sofa’ for the interview. Listening to her interview was one of the emotionally hardest moments for me during fieldwork as her story is very dramatic. In fact, it was so that even Lourdes –the project coordinator– start crying at the end of it, when we were out of Zenobia’s house.

2. THE TWO LIFE STORIES

2.1 Past: Family abuse, rape, lack of education, sexual exploitation.

Given that I have mostly dealt with childhood in the last chapter and that there are many similarities in the childhood of the at risk girls –not to mention a work count on this paper– I therefore will not spend too much time analyzing the past of these two women. I will just briefly quote what they told me about their formative years and youth. What we can recognize in both life stories is that Gioconda and Zenobia’s mothers used them in order to survive economically. Gioconda was selling cold water in the streets and later became a teenage mother, and Zenobia was selling food in the cinemas and was later sold to an old man. Their childhood was also characterized by the lack of education and it seems that they do not recriminate their negligent parents for it. As similarly illustrated in the last chapter, both idealized their mothers by under-communicating or denying many negative aspects and experiences.

For example, even if she blames her mother for beating her, Gioconda does not mention that her mother did not encourage her to go to school. Also Zenobia seems to forget that it was her mother’s decision and not hers to be sold when aged only 12 years old. Concerning Zenobia being sold and in relation to the 3 Bodies Approach (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987), not only did she suffer from the rape in the same general way

³⁹ For me Nicaraguan street system was really interesting. After the earthquakes the city was destroyed and so, the streets have no name no more. People just locate houses and places visually. As an example (an invented one) an address could be: from the big tree, 3 blocks to the North, 100 meters to the east, the pink house. So, even it was an impossible system for me, and even if sometimes would take ages to get to some places, it always worked somehow.

that was discussed in the previous chapter; but it can be seen that directly afterwards she was sent to prostitution, so her body was used by an adult again. As we will identify in this chapter, being sold to that man was an intrusion in Zenobia's childhood and to Zenobia's body but more significantly, there was also a social implication of this sale: she became sexually exploited and so she started to be perceived as the property of someone.

Gioconda.- The best that has happened to me was when I was young, and my parents were together. I think that if families remain together, I would not have entered in the 'bad life'. It is so easy to get into the 'bad life', but so difficult to get out. The worst memory I have from childhood was the separation of my parents. My father drank a lot and beat my mother. My mother had a bad character and hit him back and us too. [...] I reached second grade. I can only write my name. One of the things that I would like to do in life is to learn how to read.

Zenobia.- Well, the truth is the thing that most daze me in my life was that when I was 11 years old, when I was 11 years old I was raped, and since then I have not been able to overcome this stage. It has been the largest stage in my life and since then I hold to the work I am always doing [...] My childhood was very sad because, the truth is that I didn't have opportunities to go out and have fun. My mum did not take me out to have fun, she sent me to sell food to the cinemas.. When I didn't sell it, and would not know what to do, I would throw it away and tell her somebody stole it from me [...] (When living with the old man when she was 12) mmm, my mother was happy and me from Sunday to Sunday would come to this house to give everything to my mother. Nothing was missing. She had everything she needed: all, money and food supplies, but I was not happy. I lived locked. In exchange of living all day with him and night... I was with him in the house. I cleaned, cook and I would do everything.

B.- Did you sleep with him too?

Z.- Yes, everything. Everything. I spent 4 or 5 years spoiling my life.

2.1.1 Sexual exploitation, their experiences: past and present

Both women started selling sex when they were minors. From what they told, neither of their families could attend their needs or could fulfill the provider role. It seems both families treated them as adults and furthermore, they both lived situations of poverty and social insecurity. "Samaritanas" considers these aspects to represent how Nicaraguan society has lost the sense of protecting children (CEBS and Mary Barreda, 2006). The fact that both girls were minors when they started selling sex (Gioconda was 16 and Zenobia 12) shows how unprotected children can be.

As I said in Chapter 3, I consider children selling sex as sexual exploitation. I agree with Nicaraguan feminist Norma Moreno that kids do not choose to be sexually exploited, and that it has to be assumed that that decision is highly influenced by manipulation (Moreno, 2006). My main point of departure is then that it cannot be argued that they choose prostitution entirely freely. However, as I will illustrate in the next pages, neither Gioconda nor Zenobia were aware of this manipulation at the time of the interview. Both of them explain their starts in prostitution as a result of a personal choice rather than a set of circumstances and influencing people around them. Gioconda explains that she started selling sex because she wanted to earn more money. As she was a teenage mother, she had the responsibility of another person to feed and selling cold water⁴⁰ was not enough to raise the kid.

G.- I put myself into the street to earn more... In other job the most they can give you is 50-100 (=2.5-5\$), in the street they give you your 500 (=25\$), your 300 (=10\$)

Zenobia seems contradictory about her motives of starting prostitution, but generally she seems to relate it more to the rape than to her mother's decision as when she said "*since then (the rape) I have not been able to overcome this stage. It has been the largest stage in my life and since then I hold on to the work I am always doing*"

Both women had been selling sex in the streets since they started with no periods of interruptions. Gioconda had approximately been 15 years selling sex and Zenobia 20, thus this was a big part in their lives. It is not surprising that, when asked what was the best thing that had happened in their lives, they both related adult anecdotes related to prostitution. Gioconda reported a kind of "Pretty woman" story that happened to her with a man who did not want sex but only company, and wanted her to fly with him to United States. As far as her experience concerns, a man who did not want to have sex, but gave her presents and treated her and her family well probably had a hidden agenda. As I will illustrate in this thesis most of my informants seem to perceive manhood as inevitably negative. However, it is also true –and we will never get to know the real truth about this man's intentions– that traffic webs do exist and sometimes operate like

⁴⁰ Cold water sellers were very typical in Nicaragua. Drinking water from the tap is highly toxic, so people who can afford it pay for clean one. Water sellers in the streets sold small plastics filled of this supposed clean water for 1 córdoba (=0'01 euro cents). They would carry a huge bag on top of their heads or shoulders filled with the small plastics. Bus drivers and bus users were the majority of their clients. In average, as far as I got to know in my stay, they would sell approximately 100 of these small bags per day which, at the end of the day, transformed in 1 dollar.

this: someone promises a better future, giving money and inviting a girl or a woman to move away from her country apparently with all the “best” promises.

G.- The best that has happened to me in my life was a panama client who paid me 100-150\$... well... I met him one night I was going home and was about to take a taxi and he appeared in his car... well I was leaving... and he asked me if I wanted a ride. I said yes, so I would save the taxi back home. Then he asked me if I wanted to have dinner with him and he invited me. That day he gave me 100\$ and when he took me home he gave my mother 40\$. He was very good. He would buy me sandals, he gave me money and would tell me to buy beautiful dresses. One day he asked me to go with him to United States, to California, but I refused. I was afraid. What if he sold me? My mother told me to take the chance, she told me those opportunities only present once in life... but I had suspicion... He is the best client I have ever had and he never touched me.

In Zenobia’s case she referred to a man as being the best thing that has ever happened to her in her life. He would pay her every two weeks. But as she was living with another man who she did not like, both men quarreled and everything ended in the death of the one she liked the most. This extract shows the existence of pimps -men that would make their life thanks to the money that a woman-who-prostitute may give him- and it also illustrates how in the end, Zenobia was not able to throw the pimp out of her house. It seems that he was given more power.

Z.- Then I told him to give me 3000 pesos (=120\$) every two weeks and that I wanted to be with somebody with whom to feel good. He accepted. He accepted and he would give me 3000 pesos, but as I had another man here... it was somebody to whom I was giving. It was someone who clean and cook but would not give me money. Whereas he (the second one) gave me money, he got me out of economic troubles... Then I decided to take the second one and when I came here, the other one wanted to kill him, the one I was bringing home, he followed him with a machete and things like that... he died and I am always resigned because I felt it as my fault.

Both women also reported other positive experiences and points of view about being women-who-prostitute. Gioconda for example explained how thanks to being in the streets they could create friendship bounds, go out and have fun. Zenobia spoke about how this life permitted her to help her whole family.

G.- Yes, I have friends. A bound is created because we are in the same, I would say... that... that... that of them being fighting between each other... they hit themselves... I don’t like it. There are women who like to fight against each other and it looks unpleasant [...] The women from the street we are happy. We have fun, go out... We have had bad times, but good things had also happened to us.

Z.- The truth is that since I got this job I have helped my mother in the little I have been able to. I helped her to prepare my sister and to help my brother to study. Sometimes I feel as the owner of my siblings, but I shouldn’t feel this way.

What these positive examples demonstrate is that being a women-who-prostitute does not only entail negative experiences, but also positive ones. This is a matter to be discussed in relation to what I illustrated in chapter 3 concerning feminists, who consider prostitution as essentially wrong and degrading like the abolitionists. I will come back to this debate in the conclusion.

Returning to the life stories, despite considering the positive aspects of being on the streets, both Gioconda and Zenobia also reported negative personal experiences. Gioconda reported experiences of violence and Zenobia of sexual transmitted diseases. According to Henrietta Moore (1994) the self representation of men may include the right to have an aggressive masculinity towards women. Besides if men, in line with Carole Pateman (1988), exhibit this masculinity through sexual relationships (the more, the better) it can be explained at least in part why street women-who-prostitute may suffer violence from clients. Clients perceive that they are in their right. Furthermore, Nicaraguan State does not regulate prostitution, hence the rules are established by the Market: he who has the money, has the power. In this case the client. Besides, as I have pointed out in the theoretical section, in a patriarchal society like this one, men in general have more power than women. And so, in this case clients have double power: that which is indirectly given to them as clients and that which is given to them as men.

When participating in the night walks and handing out condoms, I could see that violence was often surrounding these women's lives, as I mentioned in the introduction of the thesis. One of the nights, we were in the poor route inside the van and Julieta, a woman-who-prostitute who was very well known in the project, came to us and said "*Yesterday night they killed one of us*". Julieta explained how somebody stabbed a women-who-prostitute in her heart in the middle of the street. Concerning violence, Gioconda related two violent episodes committed by some men.

G.- The worse thing that has ever happened to me, and the worse memory I have from this life was when 4 years ago... 4 years ago... some men came and beat me and "machetearon". Look at the cicatrices in my arm and here in my shoulder [...] (talking about what happened to her friend) One day a man put a gun in her head. If I hadn't been there, he would have killed her... He beat me and he threw me to the floor for defending her... The situation in the streets is very difficult. There is a lot of violence. Lots of men leave without paying, others beat you...

This example illustrates the issue of the objectification of the sex worker stated by Sophie Day. She argues that as the State does not protect sex workers and given that money objectifies things, sex workers are perceived to be always available and in a way “free” (Day, 2007). Day claims that clients tend to protest against prostitution by raping the women-who-prostitute, stealing, not paying or not using condoms appealing to their right (Ibid, 2007). This last example was the reason why Zenobia was infected by Aids, which, she says, is the worse thing that has happened to her in the streets.

Z.- The worse? Everything... that they offend you, they beat you, they humiliate you... oh... the worse? That I got ill. That is what makes me indignant in my life. I would have preferred to be killed at once, puff! And not the illness [...] What really bothers me is when... what really bothers me is when there are moments in which I feel... when a man says “Look I really enjoyed without preservative, I pay you whatever you want, but without preservative”. I remember what they did to me, and so I tell him “No, no, no” and I insist “No, even if you pay me whatever you want... I don’t do it without preservative” “Why?” “Because I don’t like it” But I don’t tell any client about my disease. The one who insist and becomes angry, then I say... “No problems” I say “It’s ok... no problem, lets do it” because I am telling him not to, but if he insists and gets angry I feel he is pressing me. And I say to myself, maybe the one who infected me also pressed me and I fall into his trap then I... I don’t take care of who does not do it by himself.

This quote exemplifies the paradoxes of power. As I mentioned above, clients are the ones who have the power in the relationship with the women-who-prostitute. Using this power, some men may force the women not to use condoms, even if the results of this behavior can be disastrous such as being infected or infecting others. Thus, even if this example shows how clients can decide over women’s bodies, it can also illustrate that sometimes there is a ‘price to pay’ for that. Zenobia’s behavior, in this regard can be seen to illustrate a form of resistance.

Other negative aspects that these women have to face are those related to stigma. A big part of their lives is being lived on the streets, and so their identity is clearly influenced by this aspect. As I have pointed out in the theoretical section, definitions of identity are highly linked to social order (Moore, 1994). Therefore, there are some identities or subject positions that are more validated than others within the context of masculinities and femininities (Connel, 2002). The identity of the women-who-prostitute is highly stigmatized because it transgresses the limits of the private and public regarding sex and because it also transgresses gender norms in regard to the ideal femininity. As I illustrated in chapter 3, sex is perceived to be a private thing that should not be sold and therefore should not be public. Hence, the identity of ‘the prostitute’ is highly

undervalued. This under validation is produced mainly by stigma. We can appreciate this in Zenobia's comments when she speaks of her embarrassment in explaining her job to men. This suggests how stigma is attached to the social body (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987) and so to what people's perceptions of the body are.

Z.- When I want to live with someone I am embarrass to tell him, because I cannot quit this job because that dazes me always... because of what happened.

Far more than presenting here examples of stigma I find it much more interesting to explore how this stigma can be contested. As I pointed out in the literature review, Adahl noted in her ethnography how the investment in motherhood would be a way to fight against the stigma for women-who-prostitute (Adahl, 2001). However, as I will show in this last part of the section, resisting this stigma can take many ways and forms and so I will come back to questions of motherhood later.

Z.- My father got married with a woman, well he met her in this work, a woman who had 6 children and he honored her.

Z.- The truth is I live with an old person for whom I don't feel anything, I am not in love with him. It's only for people to see that... for people to respect me more. But, for the people I am what I am and I go out to work everyday, but for me it's not a source of happiness because from the house to the street and from the street to the house.

These examples demonstrate how gender norms can discredit the social body of a woman-who-prostitute and re-credit it again. The process of gaining credit is achieved by marriage or living together and it seems that men are the ones who can 'give' honour to the dishonoured. Therefore it shows how these women's identity is managed by others rather than by themselves and how the subject position as women-who-prostitute can be re-valued by their subject position as mothers and wives at home. Though it is not the women-who-prostitute who can improve their situation actively, but others: especially men.

Finally, and concerning their present sentiments towards prostitution, both women seem to be tired of it. They both consider that their situation on the streets was better when they were younger and sometimes think about quitting. However, Zenobia explained that, at present, she feels trapped in this job and that she seems unable to leave. This could be related to what I stated in chapter 3 in reference to the importance some

feminist give to the freedom to leave prostitution. For example as stated by Barry, not being able to quit prostitution makes it, in her opinion, a way of sexual slavery (Barry 1998 in Ordoñez, 2006)

Z.- The truth is I cannot quit this job... It is not because of necessity because I sometimes have money and... in my soul I feel a big emptiness. It is not because of the money. And now I don't know if to say it was my mother's fault... I don't know why but, I always live confused. [...] This job makes me sick. I feel sick, and it has made me so desperate.

G.-I want to quit from this... I am bored of this life... this is boring... In the beginning everything is different. One would never have expected so many things that can happen in the streets...

In conclusion, in this section I have presented how these two women started selling sex and at the same time explored both the positive and negative aspects that they have experienced whilst on the streets. They have known many people, made friends and help their families, but they have also suffered violence, Aids and stigma.

2.2. Present.

2.2.1 Prostitution, naming it and talking about it: resisting stigma.

Since the second day –the day I realized I should not use the word ‘prostitute’– I faced what I call simply a “naming problem”. As I mentioned in chapter 3, there was no common understanding between the actors in the field and I came to realize that all names being used were different and had different meanings and values. It was this issue in naming themselves that inspired me to write this section.

To analyze this further from Gioconda's and Zenobia's life stories, in this part of the chapter I explore in more detail their perceptions of prostitution, how they name themselves and how they name the others. I will relate these observations to the paradoxes and fictions that separate the private and the public and see them in relation to Gioconda's and Zenobia's self naming as women-who-prostitute. The reason of doing so is to follow Kari Kesler's advice. Kesler, a feminist and an ex-prostitute, demands when writing about this topic to ask the actors before putting forward our moral presumptions (Kari Kesler, 2002). This naming analysis will bring us to explore not only how they literally name themselves, but also the meanings of this naming.

Despite these differences, the women-who-prostitute I came to know shared a similarity: they would tend to refer to themselves by action terms and not by common nouns. This means, they would rather say “I am in the streets”, than “I am a street woman”. By using verbs, the focus is turned to the action and not to the person. And vice versa: when using nouns, the focus is turned to the person and not to the action. Subsequently, it can be argued that this preference of using verbs could then be analyzed as a resistance to this stigma of being a women-who-prostitute and towards the label “prostitute” which has a negative effect that seems to invade the whole person and her whole body (Pateman, 1988). Summing up, a resistance against what Pheterson called the ‘whore stigma’ summarized by her sentence “*She is bad for what she is, and he is bad for what he does*” (Pheterson in Kong, 2006).

Both women in the interview also used more verbs than nouns when talking about prostitution. I have analyzed this by counting the references that these two women made in relation to prostitution in their own interviews. The results are presented in a table in annex 1. Even though Gioconda and Zenobia share the principal similarity of using more verbs than nouns, I have found however two different models within.

[See table in annex 1]

Gioconda refers to prostitution as “*Street life*” on three separate occasions, “*Bad life*” and “*Work*” two times each and “*This life*” once. She refers to women-who-prostitute as “*Women from the streets*” on four occasions. She never used any term morphologically familiar neither to prostitutes nor to whores. Neither did Zenobia. However, on one occasion Gioconda mentioned the word “*puteando/whoring*” as referring to a piece of advice that she gave in an abstract case. As far as the interview is concerned, Gioconda did not consider prostitution specifically as work. She mentioned the connection, but she did not emphasize it as we will see in Zenobia case. It is clear in Gioconda’s example that the way in which she prefers to refer to herself and to the other women is “*women from the streets*”. It is not “women in situation of sexual exploitation” –which is the name “Samaritanas” would use– nor ‘whore’ nor ‘bitch’ nor ‘prostitute’ nor ‘sex worker’. However, what is interesting to analyze is that in her interview she used different ways to differentiate between talking about herself as individual and talking

about the group of women-who-prostitute as a whole. When she talked about herself she referred more to the “street” as a verb followed by a preposition and a place, for example “*I was in the streets*” or “*I go out to the streets*”. However, when she talked about women-who-prostitute in general she only used the term “*Women from the streets*”. What this implies is that she does not identify herself with a noun, but with an action followed by a place. She does however identify women-who-prostitute as a whole with a noun while not naming herself directly: “*woman from the street*”, but naming the others as “*women from the streets*”. I have previously argued that this change can be understood as a resistance to the stigma as well as a way to distance herself as a whole person from prostitution. Relating to Moore’s multiple identities (1994), this could be understood as a way to show multiple identities and not just a fixed one, as if one identity was on the streets, but not her whole self. As I indicated in the theory section, for everybody’s identity it is crucial to feel normal (Goffman, 1963). Perhaps, this trying to distance herself from the group is a way to accomplish this normality, implying that her whole self is not ‘a prostitute’, but just one of her multiple identities.

Zenobia has a highly different view towards the naming of prostitution. She employs ways of describing it that could be understood as implying a wider concern for the group. For example she employs the term “Work”(or “job”) ten times in the whole interview not only referring to prostitution on an abstract level, but also when describing herself and what she does. She employed the word “Work” as a verb 7 times revealing that she clearly defines herself as a worker. As well as this, on one occasion during the interview she named prostitution as “trade” referring to the old medieval groups that would go together as a way to organize themselves. This can be related to the view shared by pro-rights feminists who consider prostitution as work. Zenobia did not use the term ‘women from the streets’ once throughout the duration of the interview. Zenobia shares with Gioconda a limited use of nouns when describing women-who-prostitute. In fact, she did not use nouns at all –not even the “women from” way–, except when referring to “*the work*”.

It seems as if this position of Zenobia differs and at the same time is similar to that of Gioconda. None of the women use any “common” way to describe themselves as individual or as group members, but have created new (“*women from the streets*”) or

adjusted old (“*workers*”) ways of naming that could be analyzed as a way to fight against the stigma. When using the first expression they are just linking their prostitution practice with a place; but not with themselves as a whole. When using the second expression, they are trying to integrate themselves in the market. As a way of earning money, and as the market allows everything to be sold (Day, 2007), these women call themselves workers as a way to integrate themselves into society, as a way to be seen as active and productive members of it. They are not ‘prostitutes’ –in the negative meaning that Pheterson showed–, they are workers. In this sense, maybe Zenobia, who clearly defined herself as worker, had a more positive view towards prostitution in relation to society. However, at the time of the interview, both women mentioned that they sometimes thought about quitting.

In relation to this “counting” process, I have also counted and noted the way in which they name their clients. Both of them use the word client without exception, although Zenobia would call them “*man*” twice during the interview. They do not call them “sexual exploitators”, as people in “Samaritanas” project would officially do⁴¹, nor would they insult them for what they do. They just call them clients. This surprised me greatly in comparison to what I discovered during the focus group discussion with the ex-prostitutes, where they would all insult men in general. This could be related to the fact that both Gioconda and Zenobia are currently working and may tend to attribute strong sexual needs as an inevitable aspect of masculinity.

2.2.2 Present: Mothering

According to Henrietta Moore, discourses about gender are powerful because they engender women and men as defined by contrast (Moore, 1994). This can be regarded in how motherhood and fatherhood is in itself gendered. In the case of mothering, several authors have considered it to be as the central perceived role for women in Nicaragua, while the father figure seems to be absent (CEBS and Mary Barreda, 2006; Hagene, 2006; Johansson, 1999). I also observed this in the focus group discussions. Motherhood is considered to be the centre of feminine subjectivity in Nicaragua, which implies that having children is one of the ways in which women can find their objective

⁴¹ Informally, they would just call them “men” or “clients”.

and meaning in life. This is to say that motherhood would make them be useful and feel complete. Motherhood then represents the ideal femininity and it is encouraged in all aspects of life by different social agents: from family to the State⁴². However, in the case of these life-stories some contradictions will be found and will be analyzed in this part of the chapter.

To start with, neither of them spoke of their children as being the best thing that had happened to them in their lives. This is an issue I wish to come back to in the next chapter. In fact, as I will soon show, Zenobia believes that not considering all facets before having her children is the worst thing that has happened to her in her life. Gioconda had her first child when she was 14 and even if she does not consider them as “the worst thing” she does not speak about them in positive ways either. The impression she gives in the interview is that they are a burden for her.

G.- When I had my first child I was 14 years old... my kid is now 13 years... the oldest one... I was a girl because I was 14 years old. I was a mother-girl because being very young I was a mother.

Z.- The worse... not thinking, my God!, that kids would be so expensive, I received many advises and I thought of them as a joke, as a joke... but, and then? How could I get my self into such a big problem?

Having difficulties in raising their children is one of the main concerns in both women's life stories. In the case of Gioconda, one of her main concerns is money. Before, she worked almost every day, whereas now she can only work on the weekends because she has to take care of her children.

G.- What? Saving? I don't save anything... I don't save, what? savings? There in the other house I paid more than here, here I pay less. It was bigger, here it's really small. Almost 100 (=5\$) I spend in food. I buy 2 pounds of rise (=900gr.) for everyday, oil, chlorine for the clothes for them and for me (laughing), one pound of chicken, of beef... it costs 35 the pound (=1.7\$).

B.- Could you work more?

G.- I can't because the children... who can take care of them? When I go out, my mother can take care of them for a bit.

In the case of Zenobia, one of her main concerns is not being able to meet a man. This shows some tensions between her role as a mother, who has to provide and put her

⁴² We only have to rely on the fact that abortion is illegal in the country, even if it is a rape case, to see how this idea of having children is deeply encouraged.

children's needs first, against her own needs and dreams. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, both women hope and expect the best for their children. Gioconda hopes that they will not have a "bad life", with reference to prostitution or drug addiction. Zenobia expects to continue working to give her children what they need.

Z.- The oldest one is 15 and the smallest is 6, but... my God, sometimes I say to myself "I have to bear all this, It's better to be alone", but not... Just as I get out of my house the first thing that comes into my mind is that I would like to meet someone whom I like and my mind is again confused. And it is not the need of a man, because I feel well with the clients. But I know that because of their age they are suggesting me that and I start analyzing "I cannot leave my children, I cannot leave them alone" I feel sad and come back home and start crying. I can't, it is a lie... it is a mistake... I go out another day... Everyday I go out full of good hopes, but I always return with the same: I have a no.

The stories of both these women may be in line with the notion of motherhood as central for gender ideas in Nicaraguan society for example in relation to female headed households. However, these life stories also show us how difficult it can be to work on the streets and raise children at the same time. Just as Sophie Day concluded in her study in London, women-who-prostitute have to negotiate between their two bodies: the work body and their social and family body (Day 2006) and therefore negotiate between their roles in spheres of production and re-production (Mooser 1992 in Kabeer, 1994). When Gioconda had her last son, she had to stop working as much as she did before, so she does not get enough money to feed all her children. If we see this in relation to the 3 roles framework, she had a tension between her reproductive and productive role and she prioritized the first one. To conclude, it seems that it is not only ideologically that being a good mother and being on the streets can be difficult, but in the practice too. The negotiations between the production sphere and the reproduction sphere produce different notions of womanhood. Some women-who-prostitute –the ones who work and leave their children– seem to relate to the economics and to the productive roles and did not seem to centre their lives directly towards their children; although they would indirectly do it. Whilst, the ones that work less or stop working, as we will see in next chapter, seem to relate to society's gender norms, to the ideal femininity of being mothers and to take care of their children: so to the re-productive roles.

2.2.3 Present: Men

Ethnography work in Nicaragua has pointed out that women's perception of men is that they are 'by nature' *machistas* and absent fathers (Hagene, 2006). The life stories of both women that I present here show the absence of the father, both in relation to themselves as daughters and also in relation to their children. However, the idea of men as naturally *machistas* is not always so evident. In Gioconda's life story, she talked about three important men in her life, apart from the client from Panama, and she seems not to think negatively upon manhood in general, despite the violence she has suffered.

B.- What do you think of men in general?

G.- There are men who are good... there are men who are bad... there is everything (laughing). My first husband would put a gun on my head... have I told you? That man beat me, he was an old man for me. He put the gun on my head, he beat me, and he beat me with a belt. My mother several times sent him to jail [...] I have had back luck with men. The second one was worst. The last one, the father of my son, helps me even if it is reluctantly with money for the kid's food.

As I have mentioned before, Zenobia spoke mostly about the man with whom she currently lives, while she also dreams of finding another better man in the future. In her case it seems that the 'whore stigma' seems to follow her when trying to find a partner. Zenobia feels ashamed when she likes someone and she says that she does not tell a man about her feelings, which is another example of the stigma attached to their social bodies.

Z.- (talking about the man he lives with in order to be respected) He is like 60. But I don't feel good because he doesn't like the things I like. I like dancing, I like laughing... but he doesn't... he is boring. Since he looks at me, he wants us to be shut down, nothing more. To the bed... and I feel hurt when he asks me, I don't feel good. I feel bad. Sometimes I tell him I am ill, although it is not true, but I don't want him to touch me. He is offending me, I feel bad, my God!. I have told him to get out of my place, because I don't feel good. [...] And the truth is I would like to meet a person who likes me, who likes me in an honest way, but who does not look at me for what I work in, because if he is going to look at me for my work, I'd rather die alone [...] If there is a client whom I like, I don't tell him I like him. No, I never tell anybody. I am embarrassed.

2.3 Future

When talking about their future, both women see themselves leaving prostitution and think about their future in domestic terms. This notion of "domestic terms" means they both imagine their future out of prostitution and in a family, a house or with a husband.

This aspect has also been studied by Sophie Day who concluded that domestic values help distancing from work (Day, 2007). In addition, what this could mean is that they imagine their future in relation to their re-productive roles and thus are trying to re-integrate themselves into “normality”. Property can for instance be seen as central for social re-integration as seems to be the case for Gioconda’s wish in getting a house. By having a house, Gioconda imagine that she can feel integrated somewhere, belonging to some place.

G.- The dream of my life is to have my house, because I cannot live here no long. From the future I expect to be able to have my house. I ask God to help me that gives me enough patience to go on.

Having a husband and a” job” also promises social re-integration, which is Zenobia’s wish for the future.

Z.- Oh... that it would not matter to me... that if I met a man... if I met a man... In want him at least to be handsome, at least that he loves me. But the truth is, I want to leave this job because it makes me tired and I don’t care about earning money or not because not now... now it makes me feel sick. I feel it makes me sick and has desperate me so much. I would like to have a job, at least selling something... I don’t know what... do something... but not staying at home in this ‘trade’.... Because it’s unpleasant. I have seen it in the other women’s lives... old ones... and it’s a bad job.

So, what both women expect from their future is to leave prostitution, quitting their more public identity on the streets and remaining private in their homes, using Day’s conceptualization (2007). By doing so, not only will they believe that they will stop suffering from stigma, but they will also live in accordance with Nicaraguan gender norms.

3. CONCLUSION

The separation between the economy and society leads to some tensions and contradictions regarding the market that entails a demand for women-who-prostitute and regarding society, which norms condemn prostitution. Prostitution is, in the end, being productive in regard of the economy, but immoral in regard of society. As something that clearly transgresses the private and public limits, prostitution is seen “as a form of sexuality rather than as a form of work” (Day, 2007 page 80) to the limits that women-who-prostitute constitute a clearly stigmatized group.

By talking to Gioconda and Zenobia as well as with the rest of my participants, I gradually understood why Lourdes was scolding me when in our first meeting, I called them 'prostitutes'. As I have pointed out throughout this chapter, the lives of street women-who-prostitute in Managua are far from easy. Most of them start on the streets when they are very young; out of the need for money or are sent by family members –as evident in the previous chapter, it could have happened to Dulce María or as what happened to Zenobia, seen in this chapter–. These girls usually come from a background of lack of education and parental support. What could be seen as a quick escape develops to configure their lives. Prostitution begins to be a way of life.

So, calling them 'prostitutes', undermines the social, economic and familiar background of these girls. In my opinion, this whole point goes against the prejudices of those who think prostitution is an easy life and shows in line with Turid Hagene (2006), that my informants do not perform a discourse of suffering as part of their woman identity and as a way to gain virtue.

Apart from what is mentioned above, the insights and conclusions that can be extracted from this chapter are many:

First, both women entered into prostitution for different motives and remained there for different motives too. What Gioconda's life story shows is that intra-familiar violence and the need for money were her motives to begin on the streets. Money seems her main motive to continue; as she would like to buy a house and she needs to take care of her children. What Zenobia's life story shows when she was raped and sent to the old men's house is, what she explains as a controversial need that pushes her to be in the streets. So, what this illustrates is that money is not the only factor that directly brings these girls and women onto the streets; although money is at the base of the whole process. It also illustrates that the idea of childhood that is presented in these life stories is made into means of making money rather than a stage in life full of rights and needs.

Second, these women's lives and bodies are clearly defined and manipulated by their surroundings. Their parents made them work when they were young and seemed not to encourage them to have any education. Regarding the most evident example –Zenobia's being sold to a man–, it can illustrate how girl's bodies may be used by their families to

gain financially. Concerning their bodies at present, and in relation to the 3 Bodies Approach (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987), it can be seen that their social body is clearly stigmatized and defined by others. Throughout this chapter I have presented several examples of this stigmatization, but there are many others that I cannot outline here due to the lack of space. However in short, these other examples of stigma include: comparing prostitution to drug addiction, lying when asked about their job –such as Linda, another informant, would do in her life story interview– or the difficulty of linking themselves to religion. Concerning this last case, most of the women I interviewed or talked with had different and sometimes contradictory points of view. On the one hand, most of them thought that the Church and religion in general could not be linked with prostitution, as prostitution is considered a sin. Incidentally on the other hand, the women-who-prostitute were really touched when Priest Arnaldo, joined us during the night visits. Then they seem to perceive themselves accepted by the Church.

Furthermore, what is very interesting to see in their stories, is not only how they are stigmatized, but also how they deal with and fight against stigma. This may include; living with a man or marrying to be honored, considering herself out of the general group “women from the street”, considering herself as a worker or not naming themselves “prostitutes” –not using nouns, but verbs to denote the separation between their private and public identities–. This shows that even if they do not conform a political resistance group as in other countries, my informants are actively fighting against their stigma, although as individuals and not as a group. Therefore, my findings show that these women have to fight against the social stigma that sees them as immoral, they have to fight for their children, as in general the fathers will not help, and fight against the common idea that prostitution integrates all of their identities. According to Moore’s conceptualization (1994), prostitution is how they earn their living and thus represents one of their multiple subject positions, but it is not the only one.

Third, I have presented two cases of teenage motherhood which is often associated with drugs, underemployment and drop-out of school (Alarcon, 1999) and therefore associated with the feminization of poverty. Their role as mothers could theoretically help them to fight against the stigma, since as I have illustrated here, it is often motherhood which gives women their value in Nicaraguan society. However, what I

could see in their interviews was opposing ideas surrounding their children to whom they love, but at the same time by whom they feel trapped. I found that most women-who-prostitute seem to fight against this tension. An example of this is Zenobia's, statement about considering that "*not thinking before having children*" is the worst thing that has happened to her in her life. One possibility is that she said so because she was a teenage mother and her life was clearly disrupted and she had to take care of her children. Another possibility is that she links children to prostitution. Gioconda started working to be able to feed her child, and Zenobia continued working –apart from what she described as the '*need*'–, to feed her 6 children. After all, having no education, how could they manage to find another job? As they both, at the time of the interview, mentioned leaving prostitution, maybe it is having children which paradoxically makes them stay.

Fourth, what prostitution illustrates in both women's lives is that men are powerful enough to do something to these women's bodies. On the one hand, they rape them, beat them and have sex for money. As I have previously mentioned, by being clients men have the 'power' in the relationship and so they can make important decisions like that of not using condoms or not paying. On the other hand, clients also marry them and live with the women, which honor their social bodies. In relation to this, it seems that men are indispensable for being honored, although at the same time it is men who have dishonored these women's bodies since they were young.

Fifth, relating to the 3 Bodies Approach, the political body of prostitution seems to be in an uncertain terrain as it is not established as legal or illegal, which brings prostitution out of the system and controlled by the market. As for my fieldwork, I realized that women-who-prostitute are abandoned by the health and justice systems. These women do not have access to public health, whereas other workers in the country do have access⁴³. I realized this in the informal conversations we had on the "Night visits" and in their life-stories. In this respect, and even if I do not have enough space to comment in depth, it is worth noting that Gioconda said she did not feel secure and protected by the Nicaraguan State. In her opinion, the authorities do not care about women-who-

⁴³ "Samaritanas" would then try to help these women with their gynecological fares by giving vouchers; but even though, these women found very many problems and barriers when attending the health system.

prostitute. I asked her why she thought this happens and she replied that “*those people don’t have hearts*”.

As an example, during my fieldwork I found out that it was common practice that policemen would demand free sex in order to let women-who-prostitute continue working in the streets. Finally and concerning the justice system, when these women had to go to the police if they wanted to sue somebody because of rape or violence or they had to go to a trial, they often asked “Samaritanas” for help because they reported that when going alone, they were frequently ignored and stigmatized when explaining their profession.

Sixth and last, these reflections are important in order to think about how feminist stances such as pro-prostitution or anti-prostitution may be addressed in this country. In order to deal with the issue whether prostitution implies a direct choice or not, we have to think that the majority of women-who-prostitute in Nicaragua started when they were minors. So, the word “sexually exploited” can be very useful to reflect upon this issue. However, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, the dilemma begins when these girls grow up and become adults in their thirties who continue working on the streets like Zenobia and Gioconda, and who do not find prostitution as essentially negative. Considering this, would we still call it sexual exploitation? No, because they are not sexually exploited in the same sense as younger ones. Furthermore, as we have seen in the life stories, both women find positive aspects about prostitution and so, they do not consider what they do as essentially wrong. In fact, Zenobia called it “*work*” many times, which could be linked to the pro-rights feminist stances.

In order to reflect upon this issue it can be relevant to describe the life stories of ex-prostitutes. This is also meant to create a broader picture of the lives and experiences of women-who-prostitute by seeing it from the perspective of different generations and to somehow, reflect upon the cycle of prostitution in which some girls and women engage, which can somehow finish when they quit.

CHAPTER 8 THE LIFE STORIES OF TWO EX-PROSTITUTES.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ex-prostitutes were women who had previously been women-who-prostitute and attended the seminars on Friday's at "Samaritanas". They had been involved in the project during their time as women-who-prostituted and needed the organization's help concerning health and children, or were looking for a way to quit prostitution. Friday's ex-prostitute workshop consisted of an unpredictable number of women, for it was an open group. Some days, for instance there would be full attendance of more than 15, whereas other days there was no more than 4 attending women. Fridays were my favourite days in Samaritanas because on that day the women from the ex-prostitute group brought family members with them, who would attend the other group's workshops. In some of these meetings, it was possible to meet up to 3 generations of women and girls from the same family and, as a researcher, it was very interesting to see them all together.

This chapter will explore how ex-prostitutes think about their past as woman-who-prostituted. This including their reasons and ideals for leaving prostitution, whilst investigating this in relation to their personal experiences and future aspirations as they move onwards. In doing so, I have chosen to examine two life stories: Rosa Argentina's and Aura's. Additionally, in the conclusion I also look at the statements and stories of other ex-prostitutes. Even though there are differences in the life stories of Rosa Argentina and Aura, what they have in common is a past of prostitution and the hope of finding a better job. The reason of choosing these two interviews out of the four I completed was because they spoke very openly about having been a woman-who-prostituted. As I will show in the conclusion, Perla –another informant– would indirectly mention her time as a woman-who-prostitute, but did not talk about it in as much detail; and Dora –another informant– never mentioned it at all. As well as this, both Rosa Argentina and Aura came to the workshops every week without exception, so I had the opportunity to know them better.

Rosa Argentina was a 37 year-old woman who was living with her partner and their 2 sons, plus her daughter, Carla from a previous relationship. She also cared for Carla's two daughters whom considered Rosa Argentina to be their mother not their grandmother as Carla was never available. Carla would leave them for months at a time, when she was engaged in prostitution. Aura was a 34 year old woman whose whole family had a very active role in the "Samaritanas project". While I was in Nicaragua, Aura joined us on the "night visits" on two occasions, since she was preparing to become a volunteer in the project. Aura's interview was perhaps the hardest one I conducted during my stay as her life story is extraordinary and since I came to know her well and sympathised with her deeply.

2. ANALYSING BOTH LIFE STORIES

2.1 Past: Family neglect, abuse, lack of education.

Similarly as in the previous chapter, due to the lack of space I will not go in detail about these women's childhood, but just draw on general lines as they all have a similar past of family neglect, abuse and violence.

As a result of her mother leaving her when she was 3, Rosa Argentina moved from one house to another. Her father was never around, rather often working; but when he was home he would drink and beat her. Rosa Argentina told me she did not remember much about her childhood.

R.- His family told me he locked me up... he would sit me and tied me to a chair by the door and there I would spend hours... sitting in a chair. And I would sleep there and I would spend hours there sitting in a chair and I didn't have... well... until... he remembered me, he woke up from his drunkenness or it would be so late and dark that they would put me inside [...] because he was always drunk... and when he was drunk... [...] When I was 8 or 7 years old, my heart would jump out of my chest because of the nerves since when he was drunk he would come and beat me [...] he always cared about my food and my nutrition, but sometimes that is not important, there are other things too he didn't care about...

In Aura's case, when she speaks about her childhood she often speaks about herself as being "frightened". Her mother was a women-who-prostitute and did not pay attention to her or to her siblings. Since she was 5 years old, she remembers being abused by an uncle. Besides being very young, Aura started to consume drugs by sniffing glue.

The glue is used by shoemakers to paste shoes and it is the cheapest drug that can be accessed in the country. It is sold in crystal bottles that last up to 2 or 3 hours at a time. There are several reasons why these children sniff glue. As sighted by Raquel Fernandez (1993)⁴⁴ they can be summarized by: the boredom and problems of the street life, copying strategies of what others do, the need to keep warm as the glue helps them to gain temperature when they are sleeping in the streets, and finally the need to forget their present problematic situation.

A.- Then, most of the times I would wake up with no underwear. Then I thought in the beginning I was doing it myself while sleeping. But it was not me who did it. Then what I would do was not to sleep... or sleep at home, but not in my bed. [...]and when I was 8 I would go to the streets and my uncles would look for me because they didn't know that that uncle was abusing me [...] I mean, in the streets I would feel safer. I felt I could take better care of myself because I knew that... in the streets I could not sleep in open air... so if I had to sleep, I would go to a dark place nobody knew about. Sometimes I would sleep in the top of the trees, in the top of the roofs... And so, because of the frighten... then when I came back home my grandmother and my uncles would hit me.

A tension between the experience of not being taken care of and the need for support and love seems to have led these women to make premature decisions. The decision of Rosa Argentina was to live at home until she was 15, after which she escaped. The decision of Aura was to run away from home when she was just 8. It seems that both decisions led to different consequences as well as two common ones: the lack of education and the birth of their children when they were teenagers. Having their children at an early age, which was a matter of happiness, was also a matter of concern because they had to raise them as a single parent. In the case of Rosa Argentina, escaping from home led her into prostitution when she was 15.

R.- Well, and from there, because I was maltreated by my father, then I got into the streets at 14-15 years. When I was 15, I was in the streets. Then... because I never had advice of anyone, I had nobody who supported me then... My father had his partner, his wife and... well... I got into the streets because I did not have his support...

B.- Is it easy to get into the streets?

R.- Yes... I would say... when you don't have support from the people you love... and the most difficult is when you don't have money. You don't have. You look at yourself in an impossible situation... you cannot work... you can't... and so I started from there... Then I would go to the "posh route" and I stayed there for long time.

Aura's decision to escape led her to an unexpected outcome: not being taken care of again. At the age of 12 she went to live with a boy, the father of her 3 eldest daughters.

⁴⁴ <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/813>

At that time, he was 18 years old and would physically abuse her and take her earnings from selling food in the streets.

A.- I told him (his 18 year old boyfriend) I did not want to continue living with him because he beat me very often and because many women would come to our house to ask for him and I felt afraid... because when I started having sexual relations with him, my parts were itching... I had lice there in my parts... and I was a girl... I was a girl...

2.2 Prostitution

2.2.1 Starting prostitution

Right after she ran away from home, Rosa Argentina entered into prostitution. She was on the streets for approximately 15 years. During the interview she said that street life is difficult, that she experienced violence and rape and that she does not recommend this life to anyone.

B.- Did you work every night?

R.- Yes in different places. But, of course, the situation in which we are exposed, the danger to things that one doesn't want to do, or drink. And one looks that is the way more... one thinks it is the way more... how could I tell you?... more easy... the more adequate way of... but I have done things I cannot even explain why. And it has been very tough since 15 years staying up late... sometimes I wanted to be with my children... and I couldn't and I had to find someone to look after them [...] but the situation you live in the streets is very risky and difficult. You have to do things you don't want to... I would not recommend it to anybody.

B.- And how do you cope with things you don't want to do?

R.- Sometimes via alcohol... you are drunk, drinks. Then... and sometimes for the love of money then... you knew you had to bring money to your home and then that's why I did it. I had always one interest. And my interest was bringing money home and bringing sustenance to my children. That is why I did it [...] the most horrible thing has been being into this life because here either you learn to survive or you find death. Because it is very difficult since you meet a man that can kill you. I escaped two times from death. Once, they got me into a van, they took me to an open ground, they took away my clothes and there without anything (crying) [...] The second time, one black man from the coast took me and he did the same.

In the case of Aura, when she became an adult she sued her partner for aggressions. The outcome did not favour Aura; as given that she did not have an income, the judge decided to hand the girls over to the care of their father. So, directly after the court decision, she did not have a job and was also separated from her daughters. During this time, her partner continuously raped their eldest daughter Martha -whom was 9 years old- almost everyday. Aura only learn of this many months later; although she did suspect something was happening to her daughter. After which, she sued her partner again for raping Martha and he is currently serving time in jail.

A.- *Then, in those times I was feeling bad because I was not working... I met a friend and that friend showed me to go to the streets. It was then when I started doing things I should not have done...when I was walking through the streets, me alone... I felt normal, normal... very normal and suddenly tears would roll down from my eyes and I would start crying. Then I felt bad because I would ask to myself "what is happening to my daughter?"*

B.- *And how was it?*

A.- *Well, there were parts... I would not say happy. But it is as if one tries to forget what is happening, trying to cover the sorrows that one has. Because there in the streets... the majority of the women... if you ask them: why do you come here? "Because I need the money... because the situation is so bad... this and that..." But at the same time, one goes there as one can drink, one gets distracted. Independently, on having this or that client there in the streets, but one has its own money can go to some places or drink with its own money. Then, it's like... one tries to forget its own problems. But the opposite! One has to face its own problems consciously... then what I would say to myself... being in the streets, I would think "Puff! I would say, if I knew how to read like these girls near me...-I would say- I would not be here"[...] I heard that they took girls to the cemeteries and raped them or killed them and let them there without clothes and everything... but thanks God, not to me. Because since I am a girl they inculcated Christianity and since then I have always entrusted myself in God and also when I went to work. When I arrived home I thanked Him for having taken me safely and I would tell him "Thanks God Jesus Christ because I was in bad things that you know they are bad and you brought me home to see my daughters, feeling my daughters and smelling my daughters". I mean, I always thanked God when I went out because he was taking care of them, since when I went out... I left them alone... I locked the door and go... I would tell Him that if I was not looking for an honest job was because I didn't know how to write and I felt embarrassed... I always thanked him when I came home and when I went out. I always thanked him... I didn't feel bad then... to go...*

These statements demonstrate many things. First, the motives, personal situations and views regarding prostitution are different. In Rosa Argentina's statements we see a negative view towards prostitution that could be in line with society's view and with the view of the abolitionist feminist, who consider it essentially wrong and degrading. However, Aura's statements towards prostitution show just the opposite. She was in "the posh route" during one year. She said it helped her to forget her problems and it gave her money. Despite doing something "bad", she could now buy things for herself. In her case, we can see that engaging in prostitution was her own decision which brought her, in her opinion, positive and negative factors. Second, and in line with Adahl, it can be perceived how 'dirty' money was spent on children. As I have mentioned previously, in words of this ethnographer, only by spending the money from prostitution in the re-productive arena could make it 'clean' (Adahl, 2001). This can be perceived in both life stories in Rosa Argentina's statements towards money and in Aura's mental dialogues with God, excusing herself for being on the streets. Third and last, drugs were a part of the street lives of both women. In this respect, Day has argued

that consuming drugs can be a way to distance oneself from street life (Day, 2007) and from those things as Rosa Argentina explains that “*you don’t want to do*”

As done in the previous chapter, I will now go on to analyze the way these two informants think about prostitution and women-who-prostitute by counting the different types of words they used. The main difference between both chapters is that this time their answers are in relation to their past as women-who-prostitute, while in the previous chapter Gioconda and Zenobia were describing their present.

[See annex 2]

According to this naming analysis, Rosa Argentina and Aura both share a similar way of understanding prostitution as they both often use ‘the verb + place’ form “*go to the streets*” to describe them as women-who-prostituted. This form was used 8 times by Rosa Argentina and 12 by Aura. This was followed by ‘the preposition + place’ form “*in the streets*” which was used 4 times by Rosa Argentina and 7 times by Aura. Both forms again show how they try to link their women-who-prostitute identity to a place and not to a noun, so that not to themselves as a whole. In relation to the uses of nouns, they never used any of the terms ‘prostitute’ nor ‘whore’, ‘bitch’ or ‘sexual worker’. Instead, they used the term “*women*”, as the project workers would also do. This term was used 3 times by Rosa Argentina and 5 times by Aura. However, and even if they did not use any noun with a negative connotation, both women did use verbs with negative connotation like ‘*prostituting*’ (Rosa Argentina once, Aura 3 times) or ‘*selling the ass*’ (Aura once).

These results are in line with what was commented in the previous chapter, where the woman-who-prostitute seemed to distance themselves from prostitution by the use of different language expressions. However, there is a difference I have found here. In these life stories there are more evident and explicit references to their previous job. As Aura referred to it as “*having sex with other man*”, while in the women-who-prostitute group from the previous chapter, none of them used the word ‘sex’ in relation to naming themselves as women-who-prostitute.

Both women used the term “*work*” in their life stories in a positive sense, but only twice each. Besides this, Rosa Argentina considered prostitution as “*indecent work*” two more times which could be understood as a means of earning an income but not as an arena to demand rights. However, it is worth noting that Aura did referred to it one time as “*a business*” as was also observed by Sophie Day in regard to women-who-prostitute in London (Day, 2007). However, most of Day’s informants considered it this way, while it was only mentioned here in their life-stories.

Finally, and concerning the naming of the clients, it is interesting to note that neither of these two interviewees used the word ‘clients’ towards men who buy sex. In fact, Aura did not directly mentioned them at all, but rather would only use personal pronouns like “*he*” or “*they*”; whereas Rosa Argentina named them “*men*” 5 times. This ‘forgotten’ issue could be linked to the fact that they are no longer on the streets and so they do not consider them as clients but men, maybe as a way of distancing themselves from the past. It could however also be a result of “Samaritanas” workshops. As I already explained, Nicaraguan feminists –as with the “Samaritanas” workers– follow an abolitionist approach in line with Carole Pateman (see chapter 3) and do not consider prostitution as an equal contract. Therefore, in “Samaritanas” they did not refer to them as clients, but as men. As in their opinion using the term ‘client’ underestimates the inequalities of the contract.

To conclude this section, it is worth noting the importance of the role of mothering in their decisions. On the one hand, in Rosa Argentina’s case motherhood appears to be the unique motive for her to have continued in prostitution for so long. This perspective coincides with a survey that was held in 1999 to civilians in Managua, which was mentioned in chapter 2, where 57% of the sample perceived that women-who-prostitute are on the streets in order to survive and give food to their children (Alarcón, 1999). It also coincides with ethnographies in Nicaragua which point out that mothering is the essence of women’s life and identity (CEBS and Mary Barreda, 2006; Hagene, 2006; Johansson, 1999). On the other hand, as in Aura’s case it can be perceived that she seemed to have gained economic independency through prostitution and, even if her role as provider was very relevant for her decision, she was also on the streets as a way to distract herself. As I have mentioned above, the life stories show different aspects in regards to their sentiments towards prostitution. Rosa Argentina tends to have a more

negative view, whereas Aura tends to hold a more positive one. Motherhood, as I will illustrate in the next section, was not only a main reason to stay on the streets, but can also be a reason to quit. Finally, and in relation to their conceptualization of prostitution, none of them used nouns to name themselves as women-who-prostituted. Rather they preferred the 'verb + place' forms which could be linked to an attempt of distancing from their work-identity as women-who-prostituted. An interesting difference between this chapter and the previous one is that neither Rosa Argentina nor Aura used the word "client" throughout their interviews, while Gioconda and Zenobia from the previous chapter did employ that term.

2. 2. 2 Quitting prostitution

One of the most interesting aspects to analyse in regards to my informants here is their personal reasons for leaving street life. When I was participating in the night visits and walks, many women-who-prostitute asked for help and complained about the situation that they were enduring. Most would dream about having another job. Weeks passed, but nothing changed for these women. Quoting Gioconda from the previous chapter, *"it's very easy to go in, but very difficult to go out"* of prostitution.

One determining factor for Rosa Argentina's decision to stay or quit was her current man's opinion. As long as she was with someone who did not like her work, she would stop. She considers this as a sign of love, not as a sign of dominance, as it could be perceived to be that of radical feminist views. Furthermore, she also thinks that prostitution is unpleasant.

R.- There were times in which I would not go out... true? When I was pregnant or when I was with a partner who didn't like it...

B.- How did you get out?

R.- Because he asked me to quit. When I met him, I was still going out, then he told me he didn't like it... he didn't like that I was going to those places since he didn't like it, he felt bad.

B.- Was he jealous?

R.- No, it was for me. Because he loved me... He didn't want me to be exposed and also because it seems unpleasant... that he... he didn't like it.

In Aura's case, her decision was influenced differently. On the streets, she would consume drugs frequently and often forget to feed her daughters. This, at a time when she was trying to take care of them, ironically she was not. Aura even thought of sending them to "La Casa Hogar". One afternoon, in one of our informal conversations, Aura told me, whilst crying that she considers herself to have been a "very bad mother".

A.- Then, while trying to give a best life to my daughters and not quitting what I was doing, they got me and made me pregnant because I went into drugs, I would not give them food... Then I would say to myself... I would come to the Project ("Samaritanas") to see if I could send them to the "House Home" or somewhere similar... Then I said to myself... "It cannot be... my daughters are suffering... they suffered first with her dad (in that period after the trial, the father would rape almost everyday her oldest daughter in front of the others) and now I am leaving them. It cannot be. If I got myself into this, I am going to take myself out of this"

B.- How did you do it?

A.- I asked God. Then, God helped me because I would tell him that I didn't want to continue knocking down in the mud. I asked him for help... I told Him, "if you have given me your daughters to take care of them, then get me away from this." I told Him that I was going to demonstrate I was going to serve Him that I was going to help my daughters and take good care of them. And then He found how to go out. Then when I wanted to have drugs then I would feel a strange sensation in my body I didn't care anymore and stopped smoking drugs, stopped drinking guaro and I stopped going to the streets.

This section has shown different reasons for leaving the streets, but it has also shown one similarity: that both women could not get out of prostitution only by their own as their motivation was closely connected to their relationships with other people. In Rosa Argentina's decision, men had a determinant role which shows again how other adults - in this case men- may manage these women's bodies thorough out their lives. Their bodies have been raped, beaten and used by men on the streets and now Rosa Argentina's one was "honoured" (in the sense Zenobia used in the last chapter) by a man who took her off the streets. In relation to the 3 Bodies Approach, (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987) the social meaning of her body was defined by others -in this case, her husband- rather than by herself. In Aura's decision, she needed to believe in God's help to go out and assign the responsibility to God. He honoured her social body of the stigmatized women-who-prostitute and of the negligence mother. In her case it is interesting to also observe the paradox between the relationship of prostitution and motherhood. When at the time she is trying to help her daughters by working on the streets, Aura is in fact doing the opposite; as if the re-productive roles could not be, in this instance, linked in practice with prostitution, as I also mentioned in the previous chapter.

2.3 Present life

When asked about their present lives, motherhood was the main topic of discussion. In relation to this dimension of their lives, both women decided to quit their productive role and are only involved in the re-productive one. In this sense, they were performing Nicaraguan hegemonic femininity.

Rosa Argentina had 4 children. All of them were born during the 15 years of being on the streets. In fact, in the case of her first child, her daughter Clara, she was sometimes sleeping on the street with her. Then, she luckily met a Swiss man who bought them a house. However, she did continue as a women-who-prostitute in order to provide for her children. She says that given she did not finish primary school, her working options were limited and she still needed the money. When asked what was the best thing that had happened to her in her life she replied her children; who fill the emptiness she has. Saddi, a social trainer from “Samaritanas” had previously told me that one of the reasons for teenagers to become pregnant was the attempt to fulfil their emptiness, to fill what is felt as an empty space, as I also referred to in the literature review. In this example, this emptiness is exposed again, although in adult life when women can mainly be fulfilled by having children (CEBS y Mary Barreda, 2006).

B.- In all your life, what is the best thing that has happened to you?

R.- Well, having my children. My children I mean... them with everything and their bad breeding... they have filled the emptiness I have. [...] I would like them to say I was always responsible towards them. I was never... well I consider I have never been a bad mother because a bad mother is the one that leaves them alone, sends them to the streets, sends them to ask for money, give bad advises [...] I would like them to say “She always cared about us, she made us study” because that is the best thing I could do: send them to school to study, so they will not be lazy, will not be asking for money in the streets... because the one who does not study today, makes others to feel sorry for him in the street.

Unfortunately, Rosa Argentina’s oldest daughter, Clara, is currently engaged in prostitution. They have arguments concerning this, as Rosa Argentina has to take care of Clara’s children when she works, therefore she has to stay home. Rosa Argentina argues that there must be better and “*more decent jobs to have*” for young girls.

R.- Of course, I can understand her sometimes, you start having babies when you are young and you feel frustrated all your life. She lives embittered, she lives in another world [...]

look at the girls now and I tell them there is enough jobs for young girls, and that they can work decently... because now young girls are the ones with jobs. And women from my age, not... no... no... there is no job for us. For this girl there is job where she wants, but not for me. I only finished primary education... maybe if I had university studies... maybe... but me... it is unlikely for me [...]I try to make her see it... so she does not do things she will be sorry for, things that mark you all your life and which you will never forget. Once you are in... without realizing you are in the vice... you are in the alcohol vice, in drugs... without even realizing you are there... and as you drink and take drugs, then you do the things and then you do it [...]But we... in the streets you are maltreated and beaten. Men sometimes... they... they... she believes that everything is pink colour. But it is not, because sometimes, there are men who beat you... and get you and rape you as they want.

When asked if her children were aware that she had been a woman-who-prostitute, she said that her daughter was and therefore Clara blames her since she is now selling sex herself, as Rosa Argentina did. The other sons of Rosa Argentina, the twins, seem to “have a notion”, but Rosa Argentina slightly changed topic when asked about this, which could suggest traces of embarrassment.

This happened many times during my stay in Nicaragua that I discovered that children were not aware of their mother’s job on the streets, but were told that they were waitresses. Prostitution is an arena surrounded by stigma as I illustrated in the previous chapter, and so hiding their public identity may help these women feel secure about their motherhood identity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, women-who-prostitute constantly had to fight between their job identity and their home identity (Day, 2007). This example shows how ex-prostitutes also experience this fight after quitting. It may also illustrate how the ‘whore stigma’ is not only carried in all spheres of life (Adahl, 2001), but also within their entire life history.

B.- Do your children know?

R.- Well. For her (she points her daughter) it is not... not... not something new because now she blames me and tells me things... like: “why can’t I do it if you did it too?” and she tells me those kinds of things. Then... she says it is because I woke up in the streets and came back home drunk... but I tell her that I always did it in her behalf and that I never forgot my responsibilities... I knew which was my responsibility, which were my duties... and I never forgot her.

B.- And the twins?

R.- No, the twins... they have a notion perhaps... that I drank... and nowadays when they look at me and I am drinking... a beer, they don’t like it. I mean I can drink but I am not drunk... not at all... they don’t like it.

Switching to Aura, her main current concern is the situation of Martha, her oldest daughter. When the interview took place she had just heard that her daughter was

pregnant. Being 18 and appearing extremely responsible, Martha was never thought to do something like that. Considered to be a very mature and smart girl, everybody expected her to study and not to have babies until she had finished a higher education. But the truth is that she was in the third month of pregnancy when she told her mother and “Samaritanas” about it. So, the option of an abort was impossible. Abortion is in any case, illegal in Nicaragua; but Aura, as she had undergone one previously, knew the illegal options and was angry at Martha for not informing her before. It appears that after 3 months it is impossible to abort, even by illegal ways.

Aura was really concerned for her daughter as they did not have much money and she was not working. Nearly one third of Aura’s whole life interview dealt with this topic and it shows two different gender issues related to virginity and a daughter pregnancy that will be discussed in the following.

The first gender issue that I would like to highlight here in regards to Martha’s pregnancy is that related to social body and stigma. Aura shows here a contradiction, a tension between what the mother as an individual thinks –supporting her daughter– and that of which her mother as member of society thinks –she is embarrassed of her behaviour–. This is evident in the fact that Aura lied to her neighbours about Martha’s pregnancy, because the father of the baby is not her current boyfriend.

A.- I told my daughter... “you knew this one had a girlfriend and only because you liked his beautiful face you had a relation with him... You both had a relation with other people [...] I feel bad... Look, Martha was with another one (she was going out with another boy and she is pregnant of this second one)... and the neighbours asked me ‘look, how beautiful... she got this boy (in relation to number 1), she is pregnant... and why doesn’t she go to his house?’ ‘because she doesn’t want, I tell them, she is going to stay home’ (in fact, the baby is from number 2 who does not want Martha in his house with him)

Finally, the other issue that is apparent here is the importance of virginity, which I also illustrated in chapter 6 and 7. For instance, it seems that fathers can deny responsibility if they know that the girl is not virgin.

A.- “Independently of your rape, he knows perfectly that he had sex with you. He knows perfectly that he had a relationship with you and that you are... it doesn’t have anything to do with the fact that you are or not virgin. It doesn’t have anything to do”... I tell her “You have to give yourself a place... being or not a lady... you have to give yourself a space”

B.- Why is been a lady important? Is it an excuse not to...

A.- Because as the father raped my oldest daughter... even if she is or not a lady. Then he has to face it, he has to be responsible of the child. It is an excuse not to face the situation...they say 'you have been with others too, not only with me, who knows how many men you have'

To conclude this section I will highlight the importance of motherhood in these women's lives at present. Their motherhood stories have pointed out different gender issues like that of virginity, prostitution or pregnancy and have led to reflect on how women subjectivity is influenced by their relations with men and by men's perceptions. Their stories also illustrate how women's bodies are valued in relation to sexuality and motherhood. This could be seen in the fact that Martha not being virgin, made her social body undervalued (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987) as when Aura said "*you were not a lady*" referring to the fact that Martha was not a virgin. Another example is Rosa Argentina's hiding of her past as women-who-prostituted to her children. To conclude, for both motherhood represents the best thing that has ever happened to them. Contrary to what was said in the previous chapter by the women-who-prostitute like Zenobia, who said that "*not thinking before having her children*" was the worse thing that had happened to her in her life.

2.3.1 Present. Manhood

As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, when participating in the Friday's focus group discussion with ex-prostitutes, I noticed that they had a very negative view of men. This could be summarized by the way in which the participants seemed to have a 'biologist' view of gender differences. They seemed to understand men as machistas "by nature" and hence them –women– had to cope with this 'natural law', as I will refer back to in this transcription from my field notes.

During one focus group discussion with ex-prostitutes, Marina said that an ideal man does not exist and that ideal men thus could only be "*robots or homosexuals*". She also thought that men were born like this: that is, sexually oriented, violent, machistas and unfaithful. To convince the others she told a story that happened to her son when he was four.

M.- "When I went to pick him from school that day, the teacher came to me. She seemed angry. She asked, "Do you know what has happened?" "I said No" "When I

was teaching, I found out that your son had disappeared and I found him outside kissing a girl” When she finished to tell her story, she said “That is the proof that men are born like that. He was only 4 years old! ” (From my diary)

A second woman tried to convince Marina saying that she knew one special case.

T.- “He lives in the corner of our street and he... guesses what? He cleans the house and he cooks” (From my diary also)

They then began to debate this. Most of them had, like Marina, a point of view that could be related to what Connell calls the perspective of the “body as a machine” (Connell, 2002). They did not believe that a man could perform re-productive tasks, like those of cleaning or cooking. They all seemed to believe that men do not help with the re-productive tasks because it is intrinsic to their maleness. They seemed to believe that the machine runs by itself and that gender is not affected by social processes. In this way, men are seen to be born men and not made men.

This perspective was also shared by Rosa Argentina. She spoke about three husbands she has had. The first one disappeared when her daughter was born, avoiding responsibility for the child. She did not mention the father of her second son. But she specifically mentioned the last one: the third and current husband and father of her twins, who “*is not perfect*” but does not physically abuse her, he contributes to the bills and made her quit prostitution 8 years ago, as mentioned previously. This third husband has had problems with Rosa Argentina’s oldest daughter since she accused him of rape. Even if in the end the whole story was a lie, Rosa Argentina grew suspicious of him. She was once raped when young and so she mistrusts men in general. However, it is interesting to mention that even if she mistrusts men, their opinion had been determinant in her street life, as I pointed previously.

R.- I have... after all my life I have learnt to be untrustful. I have learnt to be untrusful, I don’t trust people completely... even the person I am with... why? Because I was raped. Then I... I don’t trust him, don’t trust people... I mean males.

However, regarding Aura’s life story, it can be observed that she does not have an explicitly negative view of men. When asked, she sits instead more on the side of women and she appears to view this in terms of empowerment. In her life story she repeats many times that it is important to give women a “space in society”. When giving advice to her daughters, she did not have a traditional point of view regarding

women. On the contrary, she appeared to be concerned about fighting for a place in society.

B.- Then what do you think about men?

A.- I do not think anything wrong. I think that she has to give herself her space because if we women don't give ourselves a space, they will never give it to us. We women have to raise our heads and say 'here we are, we are somebody' [...] I am not worried about her being pregnant, because the fact is that she is pregnant and the fact is that she is going to be a mother. Then, what I am really worried about is the father not showing up. That is what concerns me [...] I want him to show up here and bear it like a man, I would say, like a man that faces it. [...] Because Martha, in the future when you have other relationships, he is going to tell you "I don't give you any more money, don't you have a husband?"

A.- (she is remembering what she said to her daughter) You cannot go out of your home, Martha... you know why? If you go out from here... and you take one, two or three bags... you go there to their home and they are going to tell you 'Did we call you? What are you doing here? Go to your home' and he is going to throw you out. While if you go to his house and tell him 'you know... my mother is angry... come on and help me to take my things and go with you' but you know he is coming and taking you out... in the future, when you two will fight you will be able to tell him: 'You took me out of my house, knowing I had problems, you took me out' Because if you don't claim since now, then... I tell you he is going to play with you"

In the relationship with her actual partner it seems that they both have a say and that her opinion is really important. Aura describes their relationship as supportive. Some weeks before the interview, she told her partner that she would go into prostitution again if they needed the money due to Martha's pregnancy. She did not ask for his approval.

A.- (talking about a conversation with her actual partner) "If you are going to break with me because of that, I am not interested in you anymore... because my daughter has to move on and go ahead" and he would say "but not all men are the same. Don't think all men are the same. I am different" and I would reply "are you? The father of the girls was different too. And how different he was" I told him... "but not, he said, you know I have lived with my mother, he was alone... I know what is to raise your children alone"

Summing up this section, I have tried to illustrate the ideas and experiences that these women had in relation to men. What I experienced in the focus group discussion and in Rosa Argentina's life story is a very negative view of men. However and despite also suffering rape and violence from men, Aura seems to perceive men within a more positive content and appears to think that women can change the inequality situation they live in. These different discourses could somehow show another masculinity coexisting with the hegemonic one –the one that seems to perceive men 'by nature' as 'machistas'–, a model that seems to rely more on the decisions of women.

2. 4 Future

When asked about their future, it seems again that for both women their motherhood role is the most resilient. This is a key point in understanding why they quit prostitution as I have discussed before and what they expect as I will discuss here. Neither Rosa Argentina nor Aura has a clear idea about what their future would be, but they are both very preoccupied with the future of their children.

Rosa Argentina thinks she is too old to continue studying elementary education and to find a good job. She is studying beauty with one of the scholarships that “Samaritanas” offer and she hopes that she will be able to open a small beauty salon. She seems to be bored of being at home during the day, but she has to be available to take care of her granddaughters, and expects that the situation will eventually change. As well as this, she hopes the best for her children: that they can study and become “someone”. When talking about her future, she does not mention at all her relationship with her current partner. This is maybe because as said before, she mistrusts men.

R.- In my age is difficult... I am 37, if I start to study secondary... I will finish with 40. And what will I do being 40? Where if I don't have a job? I have seen prepared and educated women struggling to find a job at our age... But at least I am taking the beauty courses, at least I can study stylish... I don't know... but it has been really difficult... [...] Regarding my future I would like to continue studying beauty and work somewhere... ... to help my house because... being at home I don't do anything. Well and I will continue helping my children so they can have an education and can work wherever they want.

What can be perceived throughout the whole conversation is that Aura's future was, at the time of the interview, clearly determined by her devotion to her daughters and determined by Martha's pregnancy. When asked, Aura shows a strong belief for her daughter to finish school “even if we eat less for a while” and even if she has to return to the streets as a way to help her family. In sum, Aura is much more concern about her daughter's future than about her own.

A.- And If I need to sell my ass, I will sell it so my girl will finish high school. Yes, as old as you look at me, but I am going to make her finish her last year.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Studies concerning prostitution have grown increasingly important in feminist research. However, they tend not to consider ex-prostitutes as informants. The importance of this

chapter is therefore to provide information and insights in relation to ex-prostitution. What we have witnessed in this part of the thesis is a story of mistreated childhoods and prostitution. More importantly, the focus of this last chapter has been to explore the reasons to quit prostitution and the present situation of two ex-prostitutes. My main conclusions in this chapter can be summarized in five points.

To begin with, the women's perceptions of prostitution, now that they are both out of it, seem to be very different. Rosa Argentina would never recommend it to anyone and thinks having been a woman-who-prostitute is one of the worse things that has ever happened to her. Conversely, Aura is reconsidering it and remembers positive aspects of working on the streets, such as having her own money. However, in relation to their uses of different terms, they both seem to share a similar way of naming prostitution and women-who-prostitute. That is, the form 'verb followed by a place'. This has been analyzed as a way to resist stigma. A clear difference has been shown between this chapter and the previous one in relation to the naming analysis that is, the absence of the term "client" in Rosa Argentina's and Aura's interview.

Second, and in relation to the 3 bodies Approach, (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987) it has been shown how these women who used to have a stigmatized social body, have dedicated themselves to motherhood roles after quitting prostitution. In relation to Day's account of the fight between the working and the mother bodies (Day, 2007), Rosa Argentina and Aura are now focused on the latter. In these life stories, the role of motherhood has been relevant for both women as a motivation. In Rosa Argentina's case, it was to remain in prostitution, however in Aura's case it was actually a motivation to leave prostitution. Neither of them seem to be proud of having been a woman-who-prostitute. At present, one of them conceals it to her children (Rosa Argentina) and the other, even if she did not hide it to her daughters, considers engaging in prostitution again due to financial needs (Aura). In relation to my other two informants in this group, it is worth noting that neither Perla nor Dora admitted their past openly as women-who-prostitute. In relation to what was said in the theoretical section, the gender differentiation in Nicaragua between the good and the bad women, subtly relates to this. Their women-who-prostitute identity is related to the 'bad women' whereas their mother identity is related to the 'good' one, which seems to be the subject position that both Rosa Argentina and Aura are focusing on currently (Moore, 1994).

The home is seen as a place of decency and respect and so a woman who cares for her children and her home is seen to deserve respect and can be considered to be 'normal'. The shift from being women-who-prostitute to ex-prostitutes could be analysed relating to a redefinition of the stigmatized part of one's identity, as a way to fight stigma and as a way to remain "normal" in regards to Goffman's theory (Goffman, 1963). However, it is significant to highlight that in order to quit prostitution they needed either a man to support them financially or a job, which is difficult to find in regard to their history on the streets. However, and even if they quit, what these life stories show is that their women-who-prostitute identity seems to follow them irrespective of whether they are working on the streets or not anymore.

Third, in relation to what was pointed out in the literature review, about the debate of the suffering women; in this instance, even if there were many stories of suffering, when describing themselves we can see not one, but two tendencies: that of Rosa Argentina who considers herself as suffering and that of Aura who wants to be free. However in relation to womanhood and gender, as far as this group of ex-prostitutes are concerned, I did not find in neither the focus groups or the life interviews a relationship between being women and having a discourse of suffering and victimization; but one of being women and fighters.

R.A.- Well... I have been really suffering, since they brought me to this world because being left when you are 3 months, not being loved... not being loved by your own mother... then...[...] but the most horrible thing has been to be in this life, because here either you learn to survive or you face death.

A.- Me... ¿How would I described myself?... well... like a butterfly that wants to fly and fly and fly and try to... how would I say it?... to forget a little bit of everything I have lived

Fourth, the idea of an inevitably negative masculinity is evident in Rosa Argentina's life story and in the focus group discussions. However, this hegemonic view is contested by some women, such as Aura who openly claims for more space for women and who does not perceive manhood as essentially negative.

Fifth and last, it is worth concluding this chapter by mentioning the problems both women endure to build their futures after prostitution. Rosa Argentina finds it very difficult to get another job given her 15 years on the streets, as well as her lack of education. Aura is considering returning again to prostitution in order to gain

financially. Although, if she had had an education, as Aura mentioned in her life story, she would have thought about another alternative.

If we relate this to the feminist approaches mentioned in chapter 4, it is important to take into consideration that for these women to quit it is detriment to their success to either have a man by their side to support them financially, as both my informants had, or a job that can provide an economically independent position, as neither of my informants had due to their lack of education. So even if Nicaraguan NGO's are fighting within an abolitionist approach, the truth is that in reality quitting prostitution leads them to another dependent position in relation to their partners which will be discussed more deeply in the conclusion of this thesis.

My finding in this chapter suggest that as long as the State does not provide ex-prostitutes with an education after they have quit, their situation can be very unstable and they can, as in Aura's case, easily consider going back to the streets again when they encounter economic problems. This debate will be continued in the next pages which correspond to the last chapter of this thesis: the conclusion.

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION

“The purpose of anthropology is to make the world safe for human differences” (Ruth Benedict)

The main purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding about prostitution in Nicaragua by exploring a variety of different age groups of women that are involved to a certain extent in the sale of sex. My aim of doing so is to extract insights about the process that leads girls and women in and out of street life, which can be called “the cycle of prostitution”; and use this to discuss gender norms in Nicaragua as well as feminist perceptions on this issue.

The data collected for this thesis was obtained during three months of fieldwork in Managua; from which I have explored the different life stories of my informants. My findings regarding this data may be divided in two groups: those concerning the gender norms that can be explored through the life stories of my informants and those concerning the feminist’s debates that can be raised in light of my material. Hence, in this conclusive part of the thesis both types of findings will be summarized.

GENERAL REMARKS AND GENDER NORMS

The focus I have used in this master thesis by relying on informants from different age groups has tried to contribute with a greater understanding of prostitution, as research in this field tends not to include girls at risk nor ex-prostitutes as informants. What this thesis has tried to achieve is to get a wider picture of the reality of prostitution, which I intend to summarize in this conclusive findings.

Firstly, throughout the life interviews we have witnessed a story of negligent families, violent childhood, rape and lack of education. During their childhood, all my informants have experienced their bodies being treated as objects; either by rape, inspections or by being sold to men. Hence, these life stories seem to reveal a way of considering girls as already sexual and not perceiving them in the process of becoming so. It also appeared that all my informants have learnt to tolerate violence against their bodies from a young age, a process that, for many, unfortunately continued over time.

Secondly, my informants' views on prostitution varies, from perceiving it as an insulting job –Venancia–, a means to be loved and financially independent –Dulce–, a means to provide for their children –Gioconda and Rosa Argentina– or a means to fill their emptiness and forget their problems –Zenobia and Aura–. This shows that money is not the only perceived motive to engage in prostitution, whereas filling 'emptiness' has been shown as an important feature in starting it. This must be related to their possibly low self-esteem and to their family situation of negligence and abuse. Concerning this, I have illustrated how Dulce or Zenobia exemplify how families can use –or try to use in Dulce's case– their girl's bodies to provide economically, by selling them to adult men when they are young. As for my informants, and in relation to remaining in prostitution, money as well as children has developed to be fundamental motives for them to stay, as prostitution is a way to provide for their children. However, as I mentioned in chapter 8, children can also be –as in Aura's life story– a reason to quit too. In relation to quitting prostitution I have argued that it seems that women-who-have-prostituted needed either a partner or a job that helps them economically, a fact that will be analysed in the next section in relation to the feminist stances.

Thirdly, my focus on different age groups has highlighted how significantly the ideals of motherhood influence the lives of my informants during all their own lives; whether it is by their mothers' negligence –when their mothers sell them to adults or when they are physically abused or uncared for– or whether it is by being teenage mothers themselves, by fighting for their children when they are on the streets or by focusing on motherhood when they quit prostitution. Interestingly, what is evident in their life stories is an idealization of motherhood despite their negative experiences of abusive and neglectful mothers. This can be acknowledged in the fact that they seem to seek to become mothers themselves, even if they suffered from abused and negligent ones; and also in the fact that many of my informants directly idealized their mothers. Like I already mentioned several times in the empirical chapters, I have understood this as a reflection of Nicaraguan gender norms and as illustrated by the ways in which the women invest in different subjects positions related to motherhood and home. This investment in motherhood and in their homes –i.e. their private sphere– can be understood as a way to gain credit as women.

Fourthly, a special place has been given to the stigma of prostitution, due to its relevance in these women's and girls' lives. In relation to the teenagers, I have illustrated how they are stigmatized due to their family situation and due to their sexual abuse. In relation to my adult informants, I have shown how they were previously stigmatized when young –in similar ways as the girls at risk were– and how the 'prostitute stigma' seems to be not only attached to the whole person (see chapter 7), but also attached to their whole personal history even when they quit prostitution (see chapter 8).

In these pages I have also explored the way in which these women developed strategies to fight against the '*the whore stigma*', particularly regarding my adult informants. These strategies vary from focusing on their re-productive roles, motherhood and on their more private subject positions in the attempt to distance themselves from their 'prostitute identity', to marrying somebody they do not love, not using condoms or choosing different forms of linguistic expressions that distance themselves from the negative connotation of prostitution.

In addition to this, what has been explored in the last two chapters is that prostitution for my informants has entailed not only negative experiences like stigma, rape and violence, but also positive ones like friendship, partners and money.

Fifthly, men are perceived by all my informants as producers but not providers, and their desires seem to be understood as uncontrollable. The figure of the 'absent father' has been shown in each of their life stories. My informant's opinions towards men however vary greatly. Venancia and Dulce for example, from the girls at risk group share the most negative sentiments compared with the women-who-prostitute – Gioconda and Zenobia– who are the only two that state that the best thing that has happened to them in their lives relates to men.

Sixthly and lastly, as for the debate regarding Latin America and Nicaraguan women being portrayed as suffering or not in order to attain moral superiority; I have not perceived a discourse of victimization among my informants, although their life stories do show lives characterised by suffering. Furthermore, my informants would generally not employ the term "suffering" –although it was once used by Rosa Argentina–. Even

though their life stories are very dramatic and despite having suffered very much, my informants show a discourse of courage. The courage of these women, their efforts to survive and their enormous capacity of fighting against failure makes them, in my opinion, not deserving to be called “suffering women”. As far as this thesis concerns, suffering is not especially highlighted as part of their identification as women. In relation to Turid Hagene’s work (2006) whose findings are, at this respect, similar to those I am presenting here, she mentioned the ethnicity of her informants –mestizo– as influencing the fact that they were not using a discourse of suffering. In my findings, however, I can not rely on this as none of my informants spoke about ethnicity –neither in relation to themselves, nor in relation to anybody–.

To conclude, it has to be noted here that I have shown very different women and girls with different perspectives and understandings of life. Given these varieties it is very difficult to include them in an exclusive polarity such as suffering vs. not suffering women, which is a difficulty that I also found in categorizing women-who-prostitute only as exploited vs. liberated women, as I will show in the next section. As far as my informants concern, those theoretical polarities cannot accurately be applied for all people involved in prostitution, as they are exclusive and closed categories. Therefore, more research is needed in order to gain a better understanding of this, and hopefully to be able to solve these questions that remain unclear.

FEMINISTS STANCES AND PROSTITUTION IN MANAGUA

Concerning the debate about feminism and prostitution and after exploring my informants’ life stories, my findings suggest two mayor challenges. The first of them is to rethink the two perspectives of feminist thought (see chapter 3) in light of the narratives I have presented here from Nicaragua. The second one is to reflect on the responsibility of the Nicaraguan State concerning prostitution and women and girls who sell sex.

In relation to the feminist debate between abolitionists and pro-rights feminists, it is important to mention that both perspectives could be seen as partially relevant in the understanding of my informants’ life stories; although, not completely. One of the main reasons for this gap is because both the abolitionists and pro-rights feminists’ stances

have been developed mainly by western feminists and influenced by their cultural, social and economic background and not taking into consideration that the percentage of prostitution is bigger in poor countries with larger gender inequalities, limited job opportunities for women (Monto, 2004) as well as destroyed families, economic and social injustice and street children (Sandoval-Vera, 1990).

Consequently, as stated by Moreno (2006), a feminist stance in relation to the context of Nicaragua should therefore take into consideration economic and social factors, and establish as the main causes for the existence of prostitution not only the patriarchal system –which is the point of departure of both abolitionist and pro-rights stances–, but also the economic and social injustices that induce children to be seen as “possessions” of adults who can ask them for submission. The crucial relevance of taking into consideration the economic and socio-cultural context in relation to my informants’ narratives can be observed in the fact that all of my informants were minors when they were raped, all of the adults’ informants had been teenager mothers and all were living in poverty.

Hence, and in relation to the pro-rights feminism –the perspective of prostitution as the liberation of women–, we can not disregard the fact that most of the women-who-prostitute in this thesis began working in the streets when they were minors such as Rosa Argentina, Zenobia and Gioconda; a situation which is considered a crime against Children’s rights. When we are talking about children in prostitution in particular, an empowerment view and a pro-rights stance is totally inapplicable. The paradox, in my opinion, starts when these girls grow up and become adults with their own families. They, as I have presented here, do not consider prostitution as essentially wrong as for example Gioconda mentioning she sometimes has fun on the streets. And as women-who-prostitute they, as I mentioned in chapter 7, are not sexually exploited in the same way as they were when being minors. Hence, a paradox emerges concerning the relationship of age and the pro-rights prostitution stances.

Focusing on the women-who-prostitute, it is true that they become financially independent and therefore are empowered in the sense that they have more control over certain aspects of their lives, as Aura reported. However, we have seen in their experiences that engaging in prostitution was not always a “free” choice, such as

Zenobia being sold at a young age or Gioconda needing the money to provide for her first daughter when she was only 14. Hence, a perspective of prostitution as empowerment does not fit with these women's lives, as it disregards the circumstances that lead them to begin selling sex in the first place. However, a pro-rights feminist stance in Nicaragua could perhaps be positive in relation to questions regarding "the political body" as for example the fight against stigma and problems of marginality, seeing prostitution as work in an attempt to improve their rights. Although, as I commented above, it is in practice inapplicable as most begin selling sex as minors, and legalizing prostitution would underestimate this fact.

In relation to the abolitionist feminists, their view of prostitution as 'essentially wrong' –and as violence towards women– seem to fit better when we examine these women's and girl's violent and terrible stories. For example, when Rosa Argentina recalled the two rapes she suffered while working in the streets. However, as I have presented previously in chapter 3, abolitionists do not take into consideration that some women do not want to quit, or do not believe prostitution is essentially wrong and find positive aspects in working as women-who-prostitute. As I have illustrated in this master thesis, most of my informants found not only negative aspects about prostitution, but also positive ones.

What is even more important, and in relation to quitting prostitution, is that abolitionists' approaches –the perspective that fights to eliminate prostitution–, seem not to focus on what the future holds for those who want to quit prostitution, as a priority. –I suppose partly as a sign of the western orientation of the debate–. As far as my fieldwork interviewees are concerned, the job opportunities for the women-who-prostitute when they quit are nonexistent, because of their past on the streets, their lack of education and their violent childhoods. In fact as exposed here, leaving prostitution is clearly determined by having a man who provides financially. Thus, leaving prostitution thrusts the women into a more dependent position with their partners.

So, as I present here, both feminists' perspectives can be seen as partially relevant for the understanding of these life stories, however not completely. In order to stand for a pro-prostitution feminism in the Nicaraguan context, it is necessary to reflect deeper into the difficult economic and social conditions some women and children may face in

this country; while in order to stand for abolitionist feminism it is necessary to reflect upon the positive aspects of prostitution, as well as upon the future of those who quit. Concerning this and given that Nicaraguan feminists tend to be abolitionists, the practical outcome of their ideals have to be linked to the participation of the Nicaraguan State; given that it should be prepared to attend the needs of those who quit.

The State is determinant in order to put into practice an abolitionist discourse as it –in theory– should provide those women who quit with better options and opportunities. Within an abolitionist stance, the State has the obligation of giving a space to these women, of helping them to find another job and to encourage their reintegration into society. Only with this type of support can an abolitionist approach be effective. When the State, as is the case in Nicaragua, does not deem prostitution unambiguously as legal or illegal and indirectly contribute to push women-who-prostitute more into the margins of society (see chapter 7), an abolitionist approach would in my opinion not be completely efficient in practice, but probably rather remain only as a discourse.

Therefore, what my research suggests is the need to rethink the paradoxes of applying both feminist stances in order to be able to find a stance that can be useful in a context of poverty. In order to do so, more research is definitely needed –although I hope this master thesis has also contributed–. What my research also suggests is the importance of focusing on the education of these women in order to give them more opportunities to choose from. This should not only be addressed by NGOs like the CEBS –who, as far as I witnessed do a great job in Managua–, but must also be handled by the Nicaraguan State.

To conclude, and given that I plan to translate this thesis to Spanish and send it to Nicaragua, I also hope this work may encourage readers to reflect upon these women's and girls lives in order to, as Ruth Benedict states, make the world safer for human differences and help those who are constrained to "*fly like butterflies*", as Aura said.

GIOCONDA	ZENOBIA
Mala vida II/ Esta vida (<i>bad life, this life</i>)	Metí a vivir II/ Salgo II (<i>I got to life with him/ go out</i>)
Meti en la calle I/you salgo a la calle/mujeres de la calle III (<i>I got into the streets/I go out to the street/women from the streets</i>)	Calles (<i>streets</i>)
Cliente III (<i>client</i>)	Client II II II II II II II/ Hombre I (<i>client/man</i>)
Esquina (<i>corner</i>)	Andas en esto (<i>you are in this</i>)
Andamos en lo mismo (<i>we are in the same</i>)	Trabajar (verb) II II II I (<i>work</i>)
Trabajar (verb) I (<i>work</i>)	Trabajo (noun) II II II II II (<i>job</i>)
Trabajo (noun) (<i>job</i>)	
Carretera (<i>street</i>)	
Putear (<i>whoring</i>)	Gremio (<i>trade</i>)

(Table of the counting process of both women-who-prostitute life stories)

ANNEX 2

Rosa Argentina	Aura
Agarré/fui las calles (<i>took/go to the streets</i>) IIIIIII	Ir a la carretera/calle (<i>go to the street</i>) IIIIIIIII
En la carretera (<i>in the streets</i>) III	En la carretera (<i>in the streets</i>) IIIII
Allí/allí metida (<i>in/into that</i>) III	
Mujeres (<i>women</i>) II	Mujeres (<i>women</i>) IIIII
Mujeres que trabajan en la carretera (<i>women who work in the streets</i>) I	
Prostituirse (<i>prostituting</i>) I	Prostituirse (<i>prostituting</i>) I
	Salía a prostituirse (<i>She went out to prostitute</i>) I
	Yo me prostituía (<i>I prostituted</i>) I
Cosas (<i>things</i>) I	Cosas malas (<i>Bad things</i>) I
No es decente (<i>It is not decent</i>) I	No es trabajo honrado (<i>Not an honest job</i>) I
Trabajo (<i>Work verb</i>) III	Trabajo (<i>Work verb</i>) I
	Trabajo (<i>Job noun</i>) I
	Negocio (<i>Bussness</i>) I
Salir (<i>go out</i>) I	Acostarme con otros (<i>have sex with other men</i>) I
	Vender el culo (<i>sell my ass</i>) I
Hombres (<i>men</i>) IIIII	
Esta vida (<i>this life</i>) I	

(Table of the counting process of both life stories of ex-prostitutes)

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